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Israel and Lebanon: a long and bitter entanglement

Does the latest conflict fit historical trends or is this something different?

Dan Murphy

Arab militants strike across the border from southern Lebanon, provoking a massive Israeli response, with thousands of soldiers pouring into Lebanese territory and air strikes pounding enemy positions. The Israeli prime minister says the only objectives of the invasion are to "root out the evil weed" of terrorism. Israel will protect itself by pushing militants beyond the Litani River and establishing a buffer zone along the border. The Israeli incursion is also described as "limited." And though Israel says its strikes are carefully targeted against militants, at least 100,000 Lebanese civilians flee their homes and hundreds die.

That was 1978. A chain of events was set in motion that included a failed United Nations peace-keeping mission, Israel's larger invasion of southern Lebanon in 1982 to drive out the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), its occupation of Lebanese territory for 18 years, and the emergence of Hizbullah as a dominant military and political force.

While scholars debate the limits of historical analogy—Israel supporters say it's a dramatically different world than 1982, critics say it's déjà vu—the past implies that almost no one comes out a winner from these confrontations. Israel may take lots of casualties and eventually withdraw, leaving a more radical threat behind.

"This is one of the past parallels: In 1982 the Israelis go in to drive the Palestinians out of Lebanon. What happens next is that Hizbullah is created," says Wayne White, who retired as head of the Middle East desk at the US State Department's Intelligence and Research office last year.

"In Lebanon, the entire political



Lebanon destruction

spectrum is becoming more radicalized as a consequence of this. I think [Israel] can substantially destroy the existing Hizbullah infrastructure, but how long will it take? And in the end, they'll reconstitute themselves and they'll be turning recruits away by the thousands."

Lessons from the past

For now, the recent history of Israel and Lebanon's entanglements is being reflected in the strategic decisions of all parties to the conflict—all of whom seem to draw different lessons from the past.

Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah is refusing to accede to any Israeli demands, as it appears he believes his movement's relentless guerrilla attacks on Israeli forces in the 1980s and 1990s were what drove Israel from the country—and today provide a model that can be successfully pursued again.

Based on his comments and his government's actions, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert sees history as evidence that UN

peacekeepers can't be trusted to disarm militias, and is seeking to destroy Hizbullah on his own, while somehow avoiding another costly occupation, going much further, much faster than Israel went in 1978.

The US, Israel's closest ally, too, seems to see the UN as ineffectual, but is also leery of committing troops of its own—something that ended in disaster in 1983, when 241 US marines were killed in a suicide bombing on their barracks in Beirut. This time, the US is running diplomatic interference for Israel, seeking to buy time for Israel to "finish the job" of destroying Hizbullah and then find a recipe for the "enduring solutions" that US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice spoke of during her trip to the region.

To be sure, the differences between the early 1980s and today are being taken by supporters of Israel's latest action as evidence that it can accomplish more—and do it faster—without taking on as many risks.

Israel's last invasion of Lebanon was spurred by its desire to destroy the military capacity of the secular-leaning PLO, an organization whose militants enjoyed wide

support among the Sunni Arab states of the region and that by 1978 had created large enclaves outside Lebanese government control. Today, it's confronting Hizbullah, a Shiite militia whose principal backer is Shiite and ethnically Persian Iran.

The Syrian connection

Gerald Steinberg, a political scientist at Israel's Bar Elon University and a consultant to Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, says a key difference between then and now is the relative military weakness of Syria, which has supported Hizbullah, primarily by allowing Iranian arms shipments to pass through its territory.

In 2005, Syria withdrew its forces from Lebanon, pushed out by a wave of anger at the assassination of Rafik Hariri, a former prime minister and a leader of the anti-Syrian opposition in the country. The UN has since blamed

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Elections in Congo: hope or charade?

Harry der Nederlanden

With the news dominated by events in the Middle East, the recent elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have gone largely unnoticed. Yet, warfare in that country, involving numerous different factions and contiguous African states, has killed far, far more people and created refugees for over a decade. An estimated 4 million people have died from the fighting and from the starvation and diseases caused by the fighting.

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Registering to vote in Democratic Republic of the Congo



News

Israel's once-for-all solution

Harry der Nederlanden

When U.S., European and Arab diplomats failed to agree to a ceasefire on August 31, Jonathan Kay, a columnist for the *National Post*, declared this good news. A ceasefire would actually constitute a victory for Hezbollah, he argued.

"A ceasefire now would freeze in place the conditions that led to the current war. Hezbollah would remain the military overlord of southern Lebanon and would be able to launch more cross-border terrorist attacks at will. It would also retain most of its missile stocks, which means it could bombard Haifa again whenever the group's overlords in Tehran wanted to flex their muscle."

Kay is here restating the U.S.-Israeli mantra that Condoleezza Rice keeps repeating: there can be no ceasefire until the matter of Hezbollah's existence in Lebanon as a state within a state is settled once-and-for-all. Very few analysts, however, hold out any realistic prospect that the Israelis can accomplish that objective. The militants are simply too closely entwined in the Shiite population of southern Lebanon. To accomplish its objective of wiping out most of Hezbollah, Israel would have to hammer Lebanon even more ruthlessly than it is now doing. It would have to violate not only the conscience of the international community but its own as well.

It is easy to empathize with Israel's anger at being condemned by Europe (and various organizations of churches) for the inhumanity and "disproportionality" of its response, for these critics have previously said little or nothing about Hezbollah's continual "harassment" of Israel by rockets. Perhaps that level of violence is now considered acceptable for the region.

Nevertheless, the timing of this war on either side seems an act of madness. Perhaps it is true, as one Hezbollah leader indicated, that the incursion into Israel was undertaken on the supposition that Israel, already busy with Gaza, would not launch a major retaliatory strike. A miscalculation, then. But why risk so much for so little gain?

After some 20 years of reconstruction,

at last some normality and prosperity was returning to Lebanon. At last there was some hope growing among the people. Syria had at last withdrawn its military from the country, and in the elections (remember the Cedar Revolution?) Hezbollah had even become a political party, capturing a respectable number of seats. If Hezbollah had any genuine concern for the people it purports to represent and defend – or for the rest of Lebanon's people – why engage in such military adventurism?

No one denies Israel's right to defend itself against attack. But it seems to Israel's advantage to have a more stable democratic neighbor to the north rather than an impotent state rife with lawless factions. And Lebanon seemed to be moving steadily in a positive direction. It is true that its central government was yet too weak to rein in the well-armed, deeply ensconced forces of Hezbollah in the south, but did Israel really think it could impose a once-for-all solution by means of a quick invasion of Lebanon? If so, like the U.S., it greatly overestimated what can be accomplished by superior military technology.

After the first two or three days of retaliatory strikes, Israel did have a certain amount of international sympathy on its side. Most Lebanese were angry with Hezbollah for provoking Israel, and even some Arab states denounced the militants. But after a couple of weeks of bombings that punished Lebanon as a whole, all sympathy is now with Lebanon and Hezbollah.

When the fighting began, analysts surmised that the Israeli attack was calculated to stir up Lebanese anger against Hezbollah for causing this costly setback, so that the Lebanese government would be motivated to join in ridding the country of this pest. The U.S. assurance that in the long run this destruction was as much for the good of Lebanon as for the security of Israel has long ago begun to ring hollow, as 20 years of slow recovery have been undone. If the fledgling democratic government were to swallow the U.S.-Israeli line and cooperate in the destruction of its own territory, it would not survive the anger

of its people. Instead of strengthening the Lebanese government, this prolonged and devastating attack has seriously weakened it. The destruction of roads and bridges certainly does not help: the government can hardly extend its authority to where it cannot go.

In fact, to justify its attack on Lebanon, Israel initially argued that, although the Lebanese government did not sponsor the attack, it is responsible for maintaining enough control over its citizens to prevent rocket attacks on Israel from its territory. This is simply to hold the still young and weak government to a standard it cannot live up to. Were it to send Lebanon's armed forces into the Shiite south to disarm Hezbollah, Lebanon would once again be plunged into a civil war – one whose outcome would be far from certain.

If there was miscalculation on Hezbollah's part in the action that sparked this war, there was no less miscalculation on the part of Israel (and probably the U.S.). After three weeks of "mopping up" and encountering much stiffer resistance than it figured on, Israel seems about to descend into a quagmire of its own. Even if it once again occupies southern Lebanon to create a buffer zone, what will that accomplish? The missiles Hezbollah has been firing into Israel have a reach of 40 miles or more. If international forces can be found to plant

themselves in this buffer zone, how effectual can they be? The UN forces previously situated on the border accomplished little or nothing. Would they be expected to engage Hezbollah, should the latter persist in attacking Israel? Would they be expected to fire on Israeli forces seeking to retaliate

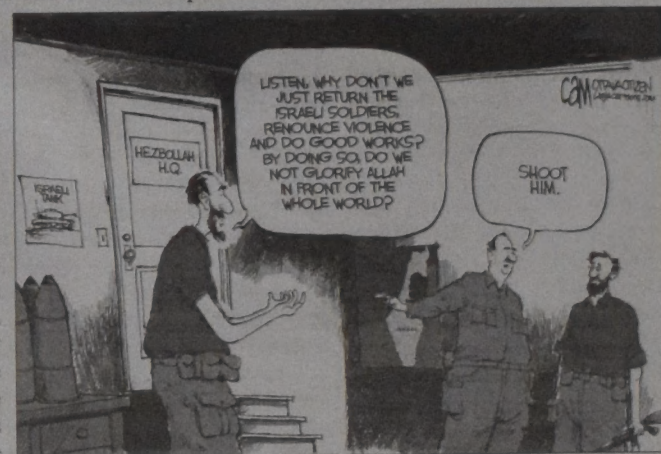
to such attacks?

Instead of eliminating or weakening Hezbollah's presence in the Middle East, by all appearances the ferocity of the Israeli response and the tenacity of Hezbollah's resistance has enhanced its status. Its leader Nasrallah is being celebrated as a hero, and the organization will have no trouble signing up new recruits to take on Israel.

No analyst expects Hezbollah to agree to the terms for ceasefire proposed by the U.S., for its very identity hinges on its status as a militant, armed force. And Israel seems to be equally intransigent in its determination to end permanently disable Hezbollah.

One weeps for Lebanon, but one weeps also for Israel. The latter has only become more isolated in the region and in the world by its pounding of Lebanon. Neither has profited one iota from this episode of madness.

Why the U.S. would opt to support an all-out attack on Hezbollah, very much a Shiite organization, is a mystery. Its goals in Iraq are very much dependent on keeping the broad support of the Shiite majority there. The Iraqi president has already condemned the Israeli onslaught and called for an immediate stop to it. If the Shiites should turn on the U.S. forces en masse (encouraged by Iran), it would cost them dearly and create an even more volatile and dangerous situation in the Middle East.



Congo elections...continued from p.1

Hopes are up that this, the first democratic election in the country in over 40 years, will bring some stability to the region. Of course, by now we have grown a bit cynical about the benefits that accrue to democratic elections.

Although the election process was far from perfect, people were able to vote in most parts of the country on the last Sunday in July, and the people of Congo displayed considerably more enthusiasm and hope than was expected, turning out in large numbers. Some areas reported a turnout of over 90 percent.

Many took big risks in a country that is still very dangerous, walking long distances to

cast their vote. With several factions involved that were (and some still are) armed rebel groups only a couple of years ago, threats were made and violence expected. The day of the elections, however, was surprisingly free of violence.

Congolese are hoping that the elections and a democratic government will put an end to over ten years of chaos, civil wars, lawlessness and border wars. A 2005 report called the Congo "the deadliest country in the world," as an estimated 1000 people a day were dying from the havoc caused by war. This, despite the presence of a large U.N. peacekeeping force that has been stationed in the country since 2000. The elections were overseen by a 17,000 member U.N. force reinforced by

1100 soldiers from the European Union. In addition, 5,000 national and 500 international observers oversaw the polls.

In the weeks prior to the elections accusations were flying that the elections were being manipulated in favor of Joseph Kabila (and that the "foreigners" monitoring the elections were in on the conspiracy). Over 30 million ballots had been printed for some 26 million voters. Why so many, demanded the critics. To stuff the ballot boxes in favor of Kabila charged several candidates. At first one of the leaders of the country's Catholic church urged Catholics to boycott the elections because of the many alleged irregularities, but a few days before the elections, he urged them to go

out on Sunday and vote "massively." The population is about 50 percent Catholic, so a boycott by the church would have subverted an election process that has cost the U.N. three years of work and over \$450 million.

Some have dismissed the entire process as a charade: there are 33 candidates for president and several thousand for other offices on the ballot, making for a confusing ballot in a country where a large segment of the population is illiterate. Although the final results will not be known for some time, current opinion has it that the incumbent president Joseph Kabila is a shoo-in. He did have some advantages over the other candidates – access to the public purse, for one.

Politics

Israel and Lebanon ... continued from p. 1

Syria for his murder.

"Syria is much weaker than it was. One of the goals of the 1982 war was to severely weaken or defeat the Syrian Army and to change the face of the Middle East. That's not even in the footnotes now," says Mr. Steinberg. "Israel could not have moved against the PLO in 1982 without engaging the Syrian Army ... today, there's no confrontation with Syria. They're essentially not a player in this."

That's a dramatically different view than the one expressed by the US; senior US officials say Syria has it in its power to order Hizbullah to give up.

Steinberg says that "talking about the complete destruction of Hizbullah is probably not realistic" and that he doesn't expect Israel's offensive will last beyond another month, let alone a full-scale invasion. He says the goals of the current fighting are to degrade Hizbullah's offensive capabilities while reminding all of Lebanon of Israel's overwhelming military superiority.

"We will end up most likely with a much weakened Hizbullah and a much strengthened Lebanon," Steinberg says. "The Lebanese don't want to pay this price again ... so we'll have increased ability of Israeli deterrence"

To be sure, not all are convinced that a limited offensive that fails to destroy Hizbullah will make the region more peaceful, or reestablish Israeli deterrence. "All that Hizbullah has to do to 'win' is survive," argues Marc Lynch, a political scientist and expert on the Middle East at Williams College in Williamstown, Mass. "A big part of Israel's power in the region is its cultivated air of absolute supremacy [and] the only people who didn't buy into this was Hizbullah. I think this is seriously degrading this cult of omnipotence."

Of course, Israeli officials continue to insist that the objective is nothing short of completely destroying Hizbullah.

Buffer zone returns

But if Steinberg is right, Israel's current strategy is dramatically different than the one employed in the last war. In 1978, with Lebanon already mired in civil war, Israel cultivated local proxies – in particular the South Lebanese Army (SLA) – to fight its enemies inside Lebanon. Then, the SLA was used to patrol the 2-mile

buffer zone Israel sought to create along the border, backed by Israeli munitions and military advisers.

Later, Christian Phalangist militias were also armed and supported by Israel to strike at Palestinian refugee camps – which led to the massacre of up to 3,000 Palestinian civilians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut in 1982 and further radicalization of Israel's opponents.

This time, Israel has no local allies, and there are no signs it is trying to cultivate them. It has repeatedly bombed Lebanese military posts and civilian infrastructure in and around Beirut. While Israel wants a buffer zone to push Hizbullah's rockets out of range of Israeli cities, Steinberg says it's unlikely the army will occupy ground in depth to try to achieve that objective.

Mr. White says he's concerned that open-ended conflict will not only win Hizbullah more support, but runs the risk of energizing Sunni as well as Shiite radicals inside the country. The sprawling Ein Helwah Palestinian refugee camp near Beirut, for instance, has become a breeding ground for Sunni jihadis seeking to fight the US in Iraq, and there are also disgruntled Sunni communities in the north of the country, and in southern cities like Tyre.

White says the logic of Israel's incursion is likely to pull them ever deeper into the country, as in 1982, and that in doing so, they're likely to create new recruits to radical causes.

"In north Lebanon for 30 to 40 years, there has been a Sunni militant tendency centered in Tripoli. This militancy has grown significantly and it has been fueled by guys who have gone and participated in the jihad in Iraq," he says. "This move could also reenergize those huge Palestinian communities in Tyre and Sidon to become jihadis and join the fight."

He also argues that the relative weakness of Syria this time around ironically works against Israel's interests since Syria, a secular Baathist regime, has reasons of its own to fear Islamist militants.

"When Syria was there, it was possible to do stuff if it chose to play ball," he says. "In the late 1980s Amal and Hizbullah were duking it out, and the Syrians were backing Amal, a more secular Shiite option than the Iranian-backed Hizbullah. So the

Sabbath rest
and the balanced life

I have been writing this column under different titles since 1990 – for just over 16 years. In that time my life has changed in several ways. I have taught any number of young people and have had to say goodbye to them when they have finished their studies. Some of these I have grown to love a great deal, and it is always a treat to spend time with one of my protégés from the past. Ten years ago I married at the ripe age of 41 to the most wonderful woman in the world. Two years later our daughter was born 14 weeks early. Three years ago my book, *Political Visions and Illusions*, was published and a year later it won a Word Guild award.

During this time I have also suffered through four bouts of depression, most recently at the beginning of May of this year. It is slowly dawning on me that I have a propensity for this and that I need to reorder my life's priorities to achieve a better balance. There have been some dark times over the last three months, but, through God's grace and with the help of medication, I am feeling much, much better.

Through all this I am learning some difficult lessons about living a balanced life, one of which is a new appreciation for the fourth commandment, which enjoins us to keep sabbath. To be sure, I grew up in a strongly sabbatarian community, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. As a child my siblings and I were prohibited from listening to certain records on Sunday, one of which, I seem to recall, was Manos Hadjidakis' title song from the 1960 film, *Never on Sunday!* Later in life I smiled at such legalisms, assuming that Paul's words in Romans 14:5 made such practices obsolete in the New Covenant.

However, the commandment is also about rest, which I have not taken as seriously as I should over the years. I hadn't thought of myself as a

Principalities
& Powers

David T. Koyzis

workaholic, but in retrospect it seems I am always in at least a low level work mode, thinking about the next lecture or the next book or article I'm writing, even when I wake up in the middle of the night. Consequently, since May I have been more removed from current events and the media than I have been in probably 40 years. Ironically, for me right now sabbath rest seems to come in the form of hard manual labour – in the garden and around the house. For some people this is their work, but for me it's exactly the change of pace that I'm finding restorative.

Right now one of the real sources of healing for me is my ongoing effort to versify and arrange the tunes for the Genevan Psalms. This is something I've worked on for just over two decades, but it has intensified during the depressive episodes. Over the past weeks I have posted a lot more material on my website devoted to the Psalter. It is labor, to be sure – but it's a labor of love and very much a shift from my day-to-day work.

After more than a decade and a half I will be taking a short break from writing this column. For the next three months one of my protégés, Brian Dijkema, will be taking my place and writing under the title above. Dijkema works for the Christian Labour Association of Canada and studies political theory at the Institute for Christian Studies. I plan to be back in December, refreshed and, God willing, beginning to live a more balanced life.

David T. Koyzis is still teaching political science at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and requests readers' prayers for healing. His psalter website can be found by typing "Genevan Psalter" into Google and clicking on the first page to come up.



Syrians sent an infantry company out to a neighborhood where they knew a house was being held by Hizbullah, woke up some sleepy militiamen and then machine-gunned them up against the wall. That got people's attention. They can't do that anymore."

Hizbullah is not Hamas

Mouin Rabbani, a senior Middle East analyst for the International Crisis Group, says he's alarmed by the prospect that Israel may pursue the same strategy it has deployed in Gaza to box in Hamas, the militant party elected to power there early this year, and says the best course in Lebanon now would be a cease-fire. He argues that an open-ended assault on Hizbullah could destabilize Lebanon further and perhaps drive it back into civil war.

While Israel's conflict with Hizbullah needs to be treated separately from its fight with Hamas, the ongoing strategy has been far from a recipe for peace and

security, he says. Instead, Hamas, which has been internationally isolated since it won power, he says, is being made more committed to violent confrontation.

Earlier this summer, Hamas renounced its unilateral cease-fire on June 9, and kidnapped an Israeli soldier last month, beginning this two-front confrontation.

"Political integration and democratic politics were and remain for Hamas an experiment," Mr. Rabbani says. "It was based on the premise that they could achieve more of their objectives through pursuit of political power

than through militant opposition ... now their message is let us govern or watch us fight."

The lesson of Israel's approach in both cases is not a positive one, he argues. "Both of these crises demonstrate that unilateralism based on superior power and based on seeking to resolve problems by refusing to acknowledge even the existence of a partner [but] based rather on the concept that Israel has sufficiently overwhelming superior force to produce the outcome that it wants ... fails."

Dan Murphy is a staff writer of *The Christian Science Monitor*

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Editorial

On wildflowers and the history of the sexes

Harry der Nederlanden

During vacation week, while I was hiking along roads in our neighborhood, the numerous wildflowers blooming everywhere in the ditches caught my eyes. Mile after mile of roadside is lined with blue, yellow and white flowers. Red seems rather rare.

I don't know the names of very many of them: Queen Anne's lace, cornflowers (why are they called cornflowers when they're bright blue?), buttercups, tall yellow hawkweed and tiny yellow bud-like flowers that crawl along the ground, sow thistle, asters, bullrushes, purple loosestrife, milkweed. I probably got some of the names wrong, and I'm only naming the ones that are very common – weeds really – not the spectacular ones you stumble on and stop you in your tracks.

I'm talking of the ones we usually walk or drive right by without really seeing. If you find these in your garden, whether it's among the beans or among the roses, you'd probably pull them. But in the ditches and fields they're lovely. That seems arbitrary. But it's part of culture. We don't want weeds growing where we've planted beans or where we've laid out our flowerbeds – no matter how pretty they look in the ditches.

Walking along the road, stopping now and then to snap photos of some of the flowers so I could look them up on the internet when I got home, I was also mulling over some discussions on the place of women in the church – discussions sparked by the recent CRC decision not to allow women on the floor of synod yet.

"Were the age-old cultural practices of separating women from men and assigning them different roles in society and church equally arbitrary?" I wondered. Like wildflowers, the gifts of women were appreciated as long as they remained in their place – by the side of the road.

Recently I was party to a discussion about women-in-office in which the lines were drawn very radically. One side we're all familiar with: the traditional position maintains that males-only is explicitly prescribed by Paul for the church in all times and places. To open these offices to women is to go contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture.

Heard less often – at least in CRC circles – is the charge that excluding women from serving the church as office-

bearers is discrimination, unjust, unloving and repressive. In short, it is unbiblical and a sin. What is more, it has always been a sin, so from the beginning the church has been complicit in this injustice against women. That was the position aggressively defended by one person who felt deeply aggrieved by CRC synod's recent decision.

It's a far cry from the humble stance taken by the proponents of women-in-office in the 60s. Then they were glad if they weren't rejected outright; they didn't turn the tables and say, "Your position – not ours – is unbiblical!"

But the charge of discrimination against all gender distinctions is hardly novel nowadays. It is the reigning orthodoxy in the universities and in the media. After being repressed for centuries, since the beginning of history really, only today in Western culture are women at last coming into their own as equals. Although nowadays all the big stories of progress and liberation are being trashed, the story of the suppression and liberation of women is still holding its own.

In fact, it's one of the few values by which our contemporaries still judge other cultures. Most would condemn attempts to impose our Western values on people of different cultures, but few would hesitate to support U.N. programs devoted to raising the status of women in other parts of the world. It's the one mission outreach program still considered acceptable in most quarters. Almost all others are considered a form of imperialism. Even spreading democracy is quickly becoming suspect.

In the history of the church, and in the history of the CRC in particular, the transition from males-only office-bearers being orthodoxy to being condemned as heresy is still a bit startling. Isn't it a bit extreme, even outrageous, for the next generation to so turn the tables on the previous one? But the new orthodoxy arraigns the entire 2000 year history of the church as a rule of injustice, as contrary to the Kingdom order.

After having taught the contrary for its entire existence, must we now do a complete about-face, condemn the previous practice as sinful, confess to centuries of patriarchal oppression, and ask for forgiveness?

I put it in such stark terms not just to stir up a little fireworks for sport. This is (more or less) the direction most of the mainline denominations are already taking. And it has a good tradition behind it. The churches of the Reformation have always insisted on basing what and how we do things in church on the Bible. That principle is suffering erosion, it's true, but for the most part we still believe that we cannot do any old thing in church or structure the church any way we please. We must follow Scriptural principles. That's why CRC synods commission so many study committees.

However, in the CRC we have gradually slunk toward the attitude that the matter of women in office is indifferent to Scripture. Both sides can be defended with equal validity. In our latest understanding, we seem to have concluded that the relevant texts can be interpreted either way, or that they no longer apply, or perhaps that not everything Paul said was equally authoritative. The issue seems hereby to have passed into the realm of adiaphora, that is, we've concluded that God doesn't really care whether we do it one way or the other.

That's not a position the women who lamented the recent action of synod can accept. Something so central to the life of the church and to the identity of women can hardly be a matter of marginal importance to the Christian faith, can it? They feel passionately about it, and rightly so.

new orthodoxy, for it is just as absolutist as the judgment of those who were willing to divide the church rather than depart from the old way. In fully embracing equal access of both sexes to all offices, must we at the same time declare that the old way was contrary to Scripture and contrary to God's will?

Let me trot forward some rather superficial, practical reflections first. Do we want to adopt a position that declares the practice of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, and all other churches that exclude women from church office to be contrary to Scripture, unjust and discriminatory? Is such sexism just as heinous as the "heresy" of racism?

When I think back to the way the church functioned as I was growing up, there seemed to be very little feeling on the part of my mother's generation that they were somehow being suppressed or excluded from the life of the church. Most of the men worked long hours at physically demanding jobs, but once or twice a week some of them devoted an evening to consistory meetings or to family visiting. But during the day the women often did much more in the way of hands-on ministry than the men. This accorded with the social roles of the time. Few felt that arrangement to be unjust. Go back a couple more generations when families were much larger, working hours even longer, household tasks more demanding, life less citified and distances greater: the question becomes could the church have functioned in any other way than by following the social practice of dividing tasks by gender?

If equal access to all church offices is, indeed, the only way that equality and justice rules in the church and in the Kingdom of God, then we must, it seems, declare the ways of our forefathers (and mothers, for most concurred in this) as disobedient and sinful. But I'm not ready to do that. How far back do we go? How does Jesus measure up in terms of sexual equality? Why did he choose twelve men to represent the twelve tribes of Israel? For that matter, why did God choose the way of the patriarchs? Why did he begin the human race with a male and why did he send his only begotten Son into the world as a male child?

There are no answers to such questions. Again and again God is a God of particulars. He chooses to promote his plan of redemption through this particular man – Abel, or Noah or Abraham or Isaac – and not that one. He elects the people of Israel and not the Assyrians or the Hittites.

There is also something similarly arbitrary and intractable about sexuality and gender. It will not completely let itself be assimilated by our moral reason, our sense of equality and our standards of justice. At some point in the big story we bump into silly, childish answers that have to do with God's sovereignty. We have to be satisfied with the answer – a non-answer really – of: "That's simply the way God made us!" or: "Because God said so!"

God does reveal himself and his will to us. But in other ways he is not transparent to us: he is God and we are his creatures. And to some degree creation and history participate in God's opacity. There is much in life and in history that is made murky by sin and injustice. But there is also much that is simply beyond our understanding.

There will always be weeds in our gardens. Sometimes in order to save the crop they must be ruthlessly pulled. But sometimes, too, we must let them grow. Some of them are wildflowers.

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Nevertheless, I feel distinctly uncomfortable with the

Letters

Islam: a contribution

Bert den Boggende

For the last few years articles about Islam in *Christian Courier*, and other newspapers, have been mostly negative. Harry Antonides, who probably has written most of these articles, sometimes puts a disclaimer in them, but such a disclaimer seemed negligible within the amount of negativism. While we need to be informed about the dangerous ideology driving some Islamic groups, too much negativism could easily lead to demonization. I'm sure *Christian Courier* and Antonides had no intention to demonize the second largest religion (more than a billion adherents) in the world.

In the present context it is easily forgotten that Jews fared better under Islam in Spain than under Roman Catholicism. Or that much of Aristotle's work came to Europe via Islam. Or that the Alhambra in Spain is one of the world's great architectural productions. I leave it to Antonides to inform us more about the present ideologies. Instead, I want to take a somewhat different approach.

In the early 1970s I taught for one year a catechism class, using a book that probably many are familiar with, *Never On Your Own*. One evening I decided to read some excerpts from the *Koran*, without telling where the excerpts came from. Although there were clues that these could not have come from the Bible, the fifteen and sixteen years-old catechumens did not hesitate to assign them to the Bible. It helped me partly realize why so many Christians so easily converted to Islam nearly 1500 years ago when their countries were overrun by the Arabs.

For many Christians, as sixth-century bishop Gregory of Tours showed in his book *The History of the Franks*, Christianity was often merely surface, an outward experience. The barbarism of the Franks had little to do with the love of Christ. In North Africa bishop Augustine of Hippo advocated the forcible conversion of the Donatists and anyone else he regarded as heretics. No wonder then that so many converted, especially not when advancements were offered. Compared to Christianity, Islam seemed also more tolerant and after a while its cultural expressions were on a higher level as well.

Europe borrowed extensively from this Islamic culture, as can still be seen in our language. Let me list a few Arabic words: admiral, alchemy, alcohol, algebra, candy, café, cipher, coffee, cotton, mattress, zero. While the list could be extended, the influence should be reasonably clear. Islamic ideas penetrated the West through the Persian mathematician, astronomer and poet Omar Khayyam (died either 1123 or 1132), especially *The Rubaiyat* (translated by Edward FitzGerald in 1859), through R. E. Lawrence and the film *Lawrence of Arabia*, based on the autobiography *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and through Jelaluddin Rumi.

Let me say a little more about Rumi, who was born in Afghanistan in 1207 and

fled with his family about a decade later to Turkey (Rumi means "from Roman Anatolia"). He died in 1273. A Sufi mystic and part of the Whirling Dervish movement, for whom the sacred dance was a central practice, Rumi was head of an academy, a judge empowered to make religious decisions, and a philosopher. He believed in reincarnation and universalism; rather unorthodox ideas for a Muslim. He often mentions Jesus and other Old Testament figures. His poems are often rather graphic and rough, trying to unify opposites. As an antidote to the negativism from which Islam has suffered recently, I thought a few of his poems or excerpts from them would contribute to a more balanced perspective.

Friendship and loyalty have patience
as the strength of their connections.
Feeling lonely and ignoble indicates
that you haven't been patient.

Ignorance is God's prison.
Knowing is God's palace.
We sleep in God's unconsciousness.
We wake in God's open hand.
We weep God's rain.
We laugh God's lightning.

Mystics are experts in laziness. They rely on it,
because they continuously see God
working all around them.
The harvest keeps coming in, yet they
never even did the plowing!

Live in the nowhere that you came from,
even though you have an address here.

What is the body?
Endurance.
What is love?
Gratitude.
What is hidden
in our chests?
Laughter.
What else?
Compassion.

When you're with children, talk about toys.
From playthings, little by little, they reach
into deeper wisdom and clarity. Gradually
they lose interest in their toys.

No one looks for stars when the sun's out.
A person blended into God does not
disappear. He, or she,
is just completely soaked in God's qualities.

Or the man who went to borrow a horse.
"Take the gray."
"No, not that one."
"Why?"
"It goes back in reverse. It backs up."
"Then turn its tail toward your home."

Miracles overwhelm unbelief.

See **Islam** on page 6...

Update: liver transplant

In the May 29th issue, I wrote an article about a liver transplant. At the end of the article, I indicated that the liver recipient was not doing well at the time the article went to print. She was told that it was stage three liver failure – the hepatitis C had already caused scarring on the new liver.

I am happy to report that Heather's condition is vastly improved. We see this as no less than miraculous and can only marvel at the way God has intervened.

Ineke Medcalf

Synod and women

The articles written by Jo Mae Spoelhof, Judy Cook and Arlene van Hove left me sad. The attitudes expressed seemed very negative.

Decisions reached at Synod cannot be glossed over as a way to put down women. Many women and men have struggled over the issue of women in office, and it has come at a price of separation for some in our denomination.

It is my prayer that all women and men that belong to the Body of Christ, the Church, will get on with the work, to serve one another in love and share the good news of salvation in Christ.

Sincerely in Christ,
Agnes Puurveen
Iron Springs, AB

Synod's historic, breakthrough decision

Time will show that 2006 was the year of the historical synod that accomplished the seemingly impossible: the deletion of the word "male" in the Church Order. I hated the concessions that accompanied the advisory committee's recommendation, but I seized a Spirit-led opportunity to fundamentally change the constitution of the Christian Reformed Church. Once this huge decision is ratified next year, all future decisions will need to come in line with this fundamental change. And I am trusting that they will.

To me, this decision is "two huge steps forward, one step back" for the cause of women. I also found it very hopeful to hear delegates who were opposed to women in office asking for time to process this radical decision for themselves and to explain it to their constituents. There were no threats of leaving; only pleas for patience. I took that as another sign of the Holy Spirit's presence.

I feel very badly about the fact that some women feel betrayed by what happened. But I am thankful for the insight shown by Rev. Thea Leunk, the pastor of Eastern Avenue, who recognized that, despite the fact that something was taken away, "having the word male out of the Church Order is marvelous" and by Rev. Mary Hulst, the previous pastor of Eastern Avenue, who said, "This is significant stuff. We took the word male out of the Church Order!" (*The Banner*, July 2006 issue).

On my desk I have a copy of the Church Order. I have drawn a red line through every male reference. When I page through it and look at the words crossed out in Articles 3, 7, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 43, and 73 I feel the full impact of what Synod 2006 did. I will be forever grateful that the Lord allowed me to be a part of this Synod's historic, breakthrough decision.

Peter Slofstra
Pastor of Hope Fellowship Church,
Courtice, Ontario

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Nature

Learning to be while waiting for weather

Curt Gesch

"Curt, my garden is so dry that the weeds are wilting," said my friend Teryl.

I matched her alliteratively with, "I even saw a desiccated dandelion."

Then we compared the frustrations of low water levels in our wells. Both of us agreed that we're going to have to do something. In my case, a shallow well (20 feet) just for the garden is dug and awaiting a pump. Meanwhile, I practice hand-held drip irrigation, moving a trickle of water from broccoli plant to cauliflower to ligularia to godetia.

When people ask me what I'm doing these days now that school is out (I taught grade six until June 23) or what I'm going to do with my retirement, I reply, "So far, I sit in a lawn chair watering one plant at a time. I'm getting pretty good at it."

I also practice patience while waiting for a rainfall or a pump. I'm not so good at patience.

I notice that my poppies handle drought well, and that reminds me of pictures of Afghanistan: rocks and sand, fifty-five colors of drought, and then a field of opium poppies, whose dusty green is the closest to lushness in the whole landscape.

And then I look at "my greens" on this summer's evening. A lawn with swirls of green where there is more topsoil or a bit more shade. Browns lawn speckled with pointillist plantain green. Strawberries glowing almost gold-green on the sunny side and black-green on the other in the slanting evening sun.

I can't describe these colors because I just don't have the eye for it. But I have something of an eye for birds, and birds is what I see. Swallows: bluish green tree swallows and violet-green swallows. More than fifteen swooping and fluttering and doing something unusual: landing on the garden soil and feeding there.

In the air, more swallows of the same kinds plus cliff swallows and barn swallows all swooping around feeding or perhaps just frolicking. Who knows?

I decide to look more carefully to see more colors, more creatures, and begin concentrating. It doesn't work. A sort of informed casualness is the right attitude. When I start making mental lists, I lose something and find concentration impossible. The mountain bluebird draws my eye away from the garden and I look away. Then a couple of my pigeons fly overhead with that silk-ripping sound and I'm distracted from the distraction. My dog snaps at a wasp; and I'm not getting anywhere with my careful observations.

"A poem," said someone (perhaps John Ciardi) "should not mean but be." And my backyard, giving lie to complaints about the weather, is full of being. It wants only a partner in existence, and needs not an interpreter.

I'd like to go to Afghanistan and learn how to be in that climate, to see, to hear, to taste, to smell, to belong – in however small a way – to that place. Afghanistan, not a source of conversation ("Isn't it just horrible what happened there today?") or graphic news clips, or editorializing commentary. Afghanistan, a place where sand and rock, bush and trees, birds and goats, hopes and fears exist. I'd like to know what it is to be in Afghanistan, to know it and love it as I do my backyard.



Sunrise

I woke up slowly
The old ash tree I could see through the window
Was black against the sky
Little clouds behind it were turning pink vividly
The sky changed its hue
To bright and clear blue
Suddenly the whole tree bloomed red, shining red,
Its branches reaching east.
More sparkling clouds appeared
Profusion of happy colors
With a sparkle and brightness
That can't be found or invented by any manufacturer.

Sunrise –
It's different every morning
The LORD is painting a drink for my day.

Then – with a little blow
The awakening wind
Turned the clouds gray
The tree got back to dormancy black
A dark day started outside.

But my heart was beating faster
Somewhere there is sunshine.
I hope I can reflect some
What I saw and felt to others,
The long sleepers.
They can't even imagine
What they missed seeing –
The power of the Almighty painter

And my gratitude for being so small
And allowed to see this splendor.

Anna Plesums

The natural world can bring us closer to God

Lisa M. Petsche

"Thank God for a beautiful day
I feel Your love in so many ways
in the hot summer breeze/underneath
the trees
where the shade is cool and I'm thinking
of You
and everything is fine."

These lyrics from Paul Wright's song, "I Can Feel Your Love," celebrate the simple joys of summer pastimes such as relaxing under a tree and picnicking with friends.

Similar to Wright, for many of us summer is our peak time of interaction with nature. We spend more time than ever outdoors – in our yard, in the woods and at parks and lakes.

Unfortunately, this is also the time of year when our consumption of – and damage to – Earth's resources tends to be highest, due to often excessive lawn and garden watering and car washing, increased car travel (day tripping or driving back and forth to the cottage) and use of pesticides, gas-powered lawn mowers, air conditioners and motorboats, among other things.

Like any healthy relationship, our relationship to the natural environment should be one of give and take, but some of us are mostly taking.

In today's technological, consumer society, it's all too easy to become disengaged from nature. The result is that we don't appreciate and care for it the way we should.

In a workshop I attended a few years back, Jim Profit, co-ordinator of the Ecology Project of the Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice, pointed out that since God reveals Himself to us in all of creation, our lack of respect for natural resources constitutes a denial of our relationship with our Creator. He termed this "ecological sin."

Summer is the perfect time to take stock of our relationship with the natural world, reflecting on our attitude and especially our behavior towards the sacred, life-giving resources that have been entrusted to us.

For instance, do we make an extra effort to "spare the air" during smog advisories, through practices such as minimizing car trips, avoiding engine idling, setting our air

The excerpts come from *The Essential Rumi*, tr. Coleman Barks (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1995).

PS. I have tried to separate the various parts of the poems through double lining and different indentations. The book has double lining as well to separate some "stanzas"; I have not adhered to that because that would create some confusion.

Islam continued from page 5

Faith grows from friendship

You and your intelligence
are like the beauty and the precision
of an astrolabe.
Together, you calculate how near
existence is to the sun!
Your intelligence is marvelously intimate.
It's not in front of you or behind,
or to the left or the right.
Now try, my friend, to describe how near
is the creator of your intellect!

Intellectual searching will not find
the way to that king!

Those that make you return, for whatever
reason,
to God's solitude, be grateful to them.
Worry about the others, who give you
delicious comforts that keep you from prayer.
Friends are enemies sometimes,
and enemies friends.

Muhammad says,

"Love of one's country
is part of the faith."
But don't take that literally!
Your real "country" is where you're heading,
not where you are.

... Silence
is an ocean. Speech is a river.

The universe came into being gradually
over six days. God could have just commanded,
Be!

Stewardship

Natural world... continued

conditioning temperature a few degrees higher, and minimizing the use of gasoline-powered equipment such as lawn mowers, leaf blowers and chain saws?

Do we carpool to and from sports events and other activities?

Do we take measures to conserve water, by using a pool cover or collecting rain water, for example? (Go online to <http://www.on.ec.gc.ca/reseau/watertips/> for more conservation tips.)

Do we avoid perfectionism regarding the hydration of our lawn and the cleanliness of our vehicles?

Do we tolerate a small percentage of weeds or pests, and research organic solutions to significant lawn and garden problems?

Do we buy locally grown and produced food as much as possible?

Do we teach our children to appreciate nature in our own backyard, setting up a bird feeder, growing vegetables, planting a tree and monitoring its growth, studying insects or stargazing together?

Do we engage in outdoor family activities such as hiking, cycling, canoeing, camping and visiting farms, conservation areas and wildlife sanctuaries? And do we take care to heed the naturalist's motto, "Take nothing but memories and pictures and leave nothing but footprints"?

Do we provide drinks in recyclable or reusable containers (preferably the latter) for picnics, hikes and sporting events?

Do we teach our kids that all littering and dumping is unacceptable, and act as a good role model? (One of my pet peeves is the litter around sports fields resulting from discarded water bottles and takeout coffee cups.)

This summer, as we spend time in nature, let's strive to experience our surroundings with all of our senses, allowing the Earth to speak to us.

Let's start by slowing down, substituting walking or cycling for driving, and canoes or pedal boats for motorboats.

Let's really listen to the leaves rustling in the breeze, the birds singing in the trees, the loons calling on the lake, the crickets chirping in the grass, the waves lapping at the shore, or perhaps the profound silence, depending on our location and the time of day.

Let's study the intricacies of a flower, follow a monarch's flight, watch clouds drift by.

When we commune like this with nature, we're filled with awe and a sense of peace. We connect with our Creator in a fundamental way.

Lisa M. Petsche is a freelance writer specializing in family life and spirituality. She has a special interest in environmental issues.



Searching questions

Richard Oostra is a retired businessman who spent the last 10 years of his working life raising funds for Trans World Radio in Western USA and now resides in Abbotsford BC. He enjoys encouraging Christians to participate in ministry by the stewardship of all their gifts. Richard took up our offer (see Steward's Tips), and wrote some reflections for this column. This is the first of a two in-a-row. In this issue, Richard raises a series of thought provoking questions. We do well to reflect on them:

Q. Is it fair for us to live in spiritual and material abundance while others are suffering or waiting to hear Christ's message? 1 Tim 6:17

A. The Bible gives many warnings to the rich and wealthy but this does not mean that having money is a sin. As believers we are called to minister to and help the needy. One should never become spiritually callous or glory in one's wealth by living a life of ease or pleasure, because the Bible says that those who live just for pleasure are dead even while they live. (1 Tim 5: 6) Many of us in North America have become financially too wealthy to be healthy spiritually.

Q. What about accumulating wealth? Matt 6:19-20,30

A. Jesus warned us against storing up riches on earth. Riches can become addictive and destroy one spiritually. We can see this in the lives of many who strive after riches. All money belongs to God; we are called to stewardship, not ownership.

Q. Why is so little said against accumulating too much wealth? 1 Tim 6:9-10

A. Materialism and the love of money is in our human nature. The Bible tells us that even religious leaders often love money (Luke 16:14) and today many religious leaders who pursue wealth will cater to the rich. In this materialistic and commercialized age we seldom hear of what Jesus had to say about money. He spoke on 'money' more often than on heaven and hell combined.

Q. Is accepting recognition and prominence permitted? Matt 20:26-28

A. Jesus considered it hypocritical to give the wealthy a seat of honor. He emphasized that our giving should be done in secret so that we may shun recognition. God hates pride but humility is an evidence of true spirituality. Jesus gave us this example when he washed his disciples' feet. There is no poison more dangerous, no sword more deadly than the passion for recognition and the love of money.

Q. Is loving what this world has to offer so sinful? 1 John 2:15-17

A. We are instructed not to fall in love with this life but to live for the one hereafter. To have the spirit of Jesus is to have a heart for the needy and a passion for the lost. Craving for things, the lust of the eye, pride and boastings are not from God. We are called to spiritual participation, rather than to glory and lust in our wealth.

Q. Can one become immune to this world's attractions? Luke 12:15

A. Joy in life does not come by accumulation of possessions because we are called to serve rather than to glory in wealth. The desire and love for money has destroyed many families because serving two masters is hypocritical. It is only when we seek to draw near and walk close to God that he has promised us his spirit to enable us to live pleasing unto him.

Q. How can people become blessed by God with their wealth? Rom 14:12

A. Money is a trust and we may enjoy and work with it, but to live for Christ and the growth of his kingdom should be our passion. One should not be a blind giver but instead seek

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

out truly worthy and effective Christian causes. In so doing we will discover the joy in giving. We are called to be fruitful and reach the ends of the earth with Christ's message.

Q. Jesus told the rich ruler to give away everything. Is this required of us? Mark 10:21

A. We should never let anything we have stand in the way of living for and serving Jesus. If we love family or possessions more than him we cannot be his disciples. (Luke 14:26-33) In our lives we must continually surrender all we have to him. Jesus wants to be first in our lives but this does not necessarily mean that we have to dispose of everything we possess.

Q. What would be the effect if I would give away my wealth? Matt 19:29

A. Husbands and wives should be fully of one mind in this. Some have done this gradually during their lifetime; others are planning to do this at their time of death through bequests in their will.

It is an exciting experience to be rich in deeds towards God. Jesus has promised rewards, now and in eternity, to those who are willing to invest in his kingdom. Investing in Christian causes has a ripple effect both in the souls that are being reached as well inspiring and influencing others.

Q. To whom should I give my wealth? Matt 7:11,21

A. Use the gift of discernment that God has given you as a believer. Many have left much of their wealth to their church but even for churches it is very dangerous to accumulate too much or misuse wealth.

Christian giving should be looked upon like investing. No one should invest all their money in one cause. We should look for places where our money will do the most good and will not be abused. We should look for organizations that have a good track record, are blessed by God, and have minimum overhead.

Stewardly Tip: Evaluation timeout: God does it, parents do it, bosses do it and occasionally so should you! It's a healthy habit to periodically take time out to look back and reflect on questions like the above. Ask God to help you make the changes He nudges you to make!

Readers: Thanks to Richard for sharing this reflection! You're welcome to share your 'Stewardly Tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: Living with wealth

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@cssservices.ca



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Church

Church of the higher tech

G. Jeffrey MacDonald

DANVERS, MASS. — The Rev. Mike Laird is standing in front of his congregation, admonishing them about patience. Not patience as a generic virtue. But patience with him.

It's a summer Sunday morning, and many of the high-tech gadgets that give the North Shore Chapel its up-to-date identity aren't working. The clip from "The Matrix" won't play. The Bible verses displayed on a big screen aren't the ones he wants. The soundtrack to a slide show of kids doing arts and crafts cuts off abruptly.

It doesn't help that the service is being held in a rented discount movie theater, creating perhaps a heightened expectation for special effects, especially when God is involved. But the church's volunteer technology expert is unexpectedly absent: His wife is giving birth. "Today, I'm taking a muligan," Mr. Laird says, plaintively.

Balky equipment aside, a growing number of churches are joining the movement toward a digitized ministry. From experimental congregations to mainline denominations, they are using jumbo screens, websites, sophisticated videos — everything but God thundering out of a cloud — to attract worshippers and relate to people in the language of today.

Critics rue the potential of bells and Whistler-like video images to distract from the deeper meaning of church. But as the techno-worship trend matures, users say it's serving a profound purpose: turning sideline sitters into active church participants, cultivating compassion, and making it easier for the taciturn to tell inspiring stories.

Giant screens, websites and videos

Technology is becoming more pervasive. Between 2000 and 2005, the percentage of Protestant churches using large-screen projection systems jumped from 39 to 62, according to The Barna Group, a Ventura, Calif.-based church research firm. More than half now also have websites, send out mass e-mail blasts, and incorporate video into services. Stoic Congregationalists at times use film clips to illustrate a spiritual point. Pentecostals use giant monitors to show fellow worshippers sweating, waving arms, or collapsing because they've been "slain in the Spirit."

North Shore Chapel member Julie Gil knows the merits of techno-religion. She became a Christian about six years ago while reading Tim LaHaye's bestselling novel, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, closely identifying with a career-focused character who has a conversion. Still, few knew how she came to trust God because she feared public speaking. Then a church member videotaped her during a small group discussion and produced a five-minute version for Sunday worship. "Although I knew I was being videotaped, I didn't really think about the camera," Ms. Gil says. "So it was just like talking to a friend."

In some cases, video seems to elicit as much compassion as a sermon. In Kansas, for instance, a pastor recently brought a teenage church member to a nursing home, where he videotaped her interviewing a church elder who hadn't been to a service in 10 years. The congregation watched a three-minute clip and later inundated her with birthday cards. "She was kind of teary-eyed about how much she missed church," says John Jewell Jr., assistant professor of ministry and technology at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in Iowa.

Church in the theater

Still, not everyone is enamored with the trend toward digital worship. Technology can feed an idolatrous tendency in America, one that says everything from education to energy has a technological solution, according to Quentin Schultze, a professor of communication at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., and author of "High-Tech Worship? Using Presen-

tation Technologies Wisely."

"Our overly optimistic attitude toward using presentational technologies in worship reveals the quick-fix mentality of our times," Mr. Schultze writes in his book.

Others feel churches aren't using new media enough in services. For ones that do, experts say a few principles govern the effectiveness of the technology. Mr. Jewell, for one, believes it works best when the gadgetry is not the focus of attention. He suggests using home-grown images and sounds that strike a chord with the congregation. The content also should be appropriate. Jewell recalls one of his student pastors who used neon colors and music from U2 in a presentation for an elderly congregation.

Technology is definitely the lifeblood of the North Shore Chapel, a part of the Christian Reformed Church in North America that claims John Calvin as its spiritual ancestor. During the week, the pastor offers spiritual guidance by e-mail. Some members donate money through automatic bank withdrawals, which allows the church to avoid collections on Sunday morning. Many members worship daily by logging into sacredspace.ie, a website operated by Irish Jesuits. "If you have a nine-to-five job in the cube [cubicle], you show up 15 minutes early and have quiet prayer time," Laird says.

At the theater, 30 minutes before the service, a screening room feels like an electronic lab. Volunteer Elizabeth Gilman loads tunes from her iPod into a software system designed for churches. Another member tests still shots on a big screen — a sunrise, storm waves battering a castle, a foggy harbor — selected to illustrate the idea of trusting God under all circumstances. The smooth presentation belies the perennial debates that go into it: Is God best revealed in human emotions? Animals at play? Desolate landscapes?

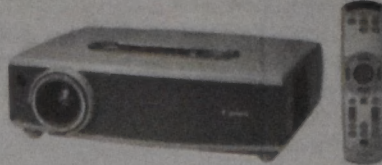
A keyboardist reads notes from an electronic screen, and teenagers in T-shirts and shorts warm up their voices and guitars. To them, the technology provides a welcome distraction for the audience. "I'm leading them in worshiping God, not us," says singer Natasha Skovron. "So it helps that they're not watching us."

The church meets in a theater, Laird says, for the same reason he leads a theology discussion group in a nearby bar: People feel at ease in the environment. Attendees, mostly young adults and children, agree the technology makes them feel more comfortable. Construction worker Kevin Toerne of Danvers, Mass., whose children go to nursery and Sunday school in adjacent screening rooms, says the "upbeat music" and visuals help make the church less "stuffy."

Julie Shimer of Rowley believes it all keeps the ministry relevant. "It makes it seem like [the church's message] is not an old traditional thing that doesn't apply to your life," she says.

Some of those most moved by the techno-ministry are the ones who have participated in staging the service. Rob Kristoff hadn't thought much about hymn lyrics until he had to pick among some 3,000 electronic images to illustrate spiritual themes. The experience made him think hard about the purpose of worship. "If a song is about the bread of life, they [in the congregation] don't just need to see bread," he says. "They need to see what it looks like to be hungry."

With a noon matinee scheduled, worshippers pack their equipment and disappear into the suburban traffic. With that, they go their separate ways — at least until everyone gets back to their computer.



Churches and faith groups urge Harper to do more for Darfur

Toronto — Several Christian denominations and other faith groups joined in writing to Prime Minister Stephen Harper commending the Canadian government for recently increasing its contributions toward ending suffering in Darfur, Sudan, but also strongly urging that more be done.

"Canadians welcome the recent Darfur Peace Agreement but remain deeply concerned about the continuing crisis and the challenges faced by humanitarian organizations in their efforts to address the increasing need for food, medical attention, and shelter in the region. Sustained security will be required to stabilize displaced populations and enable aid organizations to attend to their needs," says the letter, which was signed by representatives of Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, and Muslim faith groups. The Christian Reformed Church was also a signatory, along with Mennonite, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist and other churches.

"Canada's positive contribution to the peace process and its recent pledges to the humanitarian agencies operating in Darfur and to the African Union's mission in Sudan are important and praiseworthy initiatives," said Wendy Gichuru, the United Church's program coordinator for East and Central Africa.

She added, however, that the international community, including Canada, needs to pay much greater attention to the security of civilians in Darfur.

"Both parties to the Peace Agreement continue to violate the ceasefire and the Government of Sudan has a long history of signing agreements only to renege on its obligations," said Gichuru.

She explained this is why this fragile agreement requires substantial additional support from the international community, including sustained pressure on the Sudanese government, if it is to succeed.

In addition, she says, the faith groups' letter asks the Canadian government to

- * increase Canada's diplomatic presence in Khartoum
- * press on with its international leadership role on Darfur, paying particular attention to ensuring that the signatories to the Darfur Peace Agreement abide by the conditions and timetable to which they have agreed and that all ceasefire agreements are observed
- * be a fair share contributor to the necessary financial, material, human, and logistical resources to fully support a guarantee of security in the region through a United Nations peacekeeping presence to enhance the African Union's efforts
- * work with others in engaging all diplomatic means available to address the legitimate concerns of groups that either do not yet form part of the Darfur Peace Agreement or that have a direct stake in a resolution of the conflict, including rebel groups, civil society organizations, and victims
- * immediately increase contributions to humanitarian relief efforts such as those of the United Nations' World Food Programme beyond the recently announced commitments

Gichuru said the faith groups hope to have the opportunity, as a follow-up to the letter, to meet with the Prime Minister to discuss their call to action for Canada to help bring real and lasting peace to Darfur.

Church

Christians protest tightening of anti-conversion law in Indian state

Anto Akkara

New Delhi (ENI) – Christian groups have decried changes to laws said to enshrine “freedom of religion” by legislators in India’s central state of Madhya Pradesh, ruled by the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), a party opponents describe as having a Hindu nationalist agenda.

Under an amendment to the Freedom of Religion Act passed without discussion in the state legislature on July 26, the government now requires persons changing their religion to report to authorities about it one month before doing so. The existing law requires people changing their religion to report this to the government within one month of making the move.

The law, however, exempts reconversions back to Hinduism from such reporting and the amendments provide for stiff fines and jail term of up to five years for violating the provisions of the law which ban conversions by “force or allurement”.

“We are really worried now. This [law] will only make our lives miserable,” Indira Iyengar, a Christian activist, told Ecumenical News International from the state capital Bhopal. If government officials had to be informed one month ahead of change of faith, “they [Hindu fundamentalists] will make sure that nobody would dare to do that,” she noted.

Christians in the state accounting for 0.3 percent or 170,000 of the state’s 60 million people, have in the past reported regular harassment by Hindu fundamentalists who accuse them of seeking conversions, noted Iyengar, the president of the state’s Christian Association. “This law is nothing but denial of freedom of religion,” said Iyengar who led a Christian delegation to the state governor on July 28 pleading with him to halt approval of the changed legislation.

Under the Indian constitution, bills passed by the state legislatures have to be approved by the state governor, who

is appointed by the federal government.

A similar anti-conversion bill passed in April by the Rajasthan State, also ruled by the BJP, is still pending with the governor as Christians and others had objected to it as a denial of fundamental freedom of religion.

“There is no doubt that this (amendment) amounts to denial of religious freedom,” Roman Catholic priest the Rev. Anand Muttungal, spokesperson of Madhya Pradesh regional Conference of Catholic bishops, told ENI. However, he added that the church would not directly lobby against the legislation as it would lend credence to Hindu fundamentalists’ claims that Christians were engaging in dubious conversions.

Christian groups like the All India Christian Council and the Evangelical Fellowship of India have called for mass appeals to urge the state governor to refuse approval of the bill.

Korea churches urge Bush to talk and lift sanctions on North Korea

Kwon Hyeok-Ryul

Seoul (ENI) – The head of Korea’s National Council of Churches has written to US President George W. Bush urging the lifting of sanctions on North Korea and also the use of diplomacy to replace an armistice signed on the Korean Peninsula in 1953 with a peace agreement.

Anglican Bishop Park Kyung-Jo, president of the National Council of Churches in Korea said he had sent his letter on behalf of churches to Bush on July 7. In it he said: “It is generally understood that the sanctions against North Korea since 1950 have been enforced by the USA in its own political interest. Experts indicate that the sanctions against North Korea have been one of the significant causes of the increasing suffering of the North Korean people.”

Bishop Park noted in the letter that if the United States was really serious in its intent to relieve the suffering of the North Korean people it should immediately lift the sanctions against the communist country. In addition, the churches urged the United States to initiate a diplomatic process to

replace the armistice of 1953 with a peace agreement.

The bishop said the letter had come after church leaders and representatives of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and member churches in Asia, Europe and North America had in May held an International Ecumenical Consultation on Peace in East Asia, in Seoul.

At a conference in Kuala Lumpur on 28 July, North Korea turned down appeals to join talks on its nuclear and missile programs, saying the United States should drop financial sanctions before any talks could ensue. The six-party talks were aimed at getting North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program in exchange for energy aid, security guarantees and trade.

The Korean churches said: “We believe that the missile testing by North Korea contributes to the deterioration of relations between North Korea and the US, and between North Korea and Japan.”

They said: “Therefore, we strongly assert that true

peace in North-East Asia can not be established without normalising diplomatic relations between North Korea and the US, and between North Korea and Japan.”

On July 23, three Korean War veterans and a United Methodist bishop stationed in Korea in the 1950s worshiped together during a World Methodist Conference service at Imjingak, in the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea. The United Methodist Church News Service reported that the Rev. Seung Soon Yang, a retired Korean Methodist clergyman who served during the Korean War, was one of a few survivors from the Mt Paikma battle, where he was injured. “The cease-fire had been signed 53 years ago, yet the war never stopped in my heart,” Yang said.

In the Korean War, South Korea and a US-led United Nations force fought against North Koreans backed by Chinese ground troops and aided by the Soviets. It began in 1950 and came to a halt in an armistice signed at Panmunjom on July 27, 1953. A formal cease-fire has yet to be signed.

Slang Bible a hit in secular Australia

Nick Squires

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA – “Out of the blue God knocked up the whole bang lot... God said ‘let’s have some light’ and bingo – light appeared.”

So opens the new second volume in the popular “Aussie Bible” series. The initial installment of the Good News told in Australian slang has sold more than 100,000 copies since 2003 – this in a country where sales of 18,000 or more qualify a book as a bestseller.

The 90-page phenomenon was promoted as a “ripping yarn about Jesus of Nazareth” in which Mary was “a pretty special sheila,” Jesus was “God’s toddler,” and the Three Wise Men were “eggheads from out east.”

Not everyone is happy with the sometimes irreverent, always entertaining, rendering of the Gospel into the vernacular known as Strine, supposedly the sound Aussies make when they say “Australian.” The Bible Society of New South Wales, which publishes the series, has received about 30 letters of complaint.

For author Kel Richards and his publisher, the two vernacular volumes are an attempt at swelling the ranks of the faithful in a country where only nine percent of people attend church regularly.

“I think the appeal is that it brings back the force of the original language in which the Bible was written,” says

Daniel Willis, chief executive officer of the Bible Society. “Plus, it’s an easy read; you don’t need a tertiary education to understand it.”

In “More Aussie Bible,” Psalm 23 is reconfigured as “a bush ballad” that begins: “God is the station [ranch] owner, and I am just one of the sheep. He musters me down to the lucerne flats, and feeds me there all week.”

It also retells the story of Joseph, of Technicolor Dreamcoat fame, whose jealous brothers sold him into slavery and told their father he had been killed by a wild beast. In Genesis 37:1-36, Joseph’s father Jacob tears his clothes and weeps, but in Richards’s version he cries out: “He’s been killed! Maybe a dingo got my boy!”

The second volume focuses on the Book of Genesis, Proverbs, the Gospel of John, and John’s first letter, including the story of Adam and Eve.

“There was this sheila who came across a snake-in-the-grass with all the cunning of a con man. The snake asked her why she didn’t just grab lunch off the tree in her garden.

“God, she said, had told her she’d be dead meat if her fruit salad came from that tree, but the snake told her she wouldn’t die. So she took a good squiz [look] and then a bite and passed the fruit on to her bloke.

“Right then and there, they’d realized what they’d

done and felt starkers” – so begins Richards’ account of the temptation in the Garden of Eden.

Bibles in dialect proliferate This is not the first time the Bible has been subjected to an unusual adaptation. Kel Richards was inspired to translate parts of the Old and New Testaments into Aussie “lingo” after reading a Cockney rhyming slang version of the Bible, written by a school teacher working in the East End of London.



Review

Pioneers of the Christian mission to Islam

An Introduction to Islam, by Bassam & Shirley Madany. Middle East Resources, 221 pp., US \$12.50.

Muslims Meeting Christ, by Shirley W. Madany. Middle East Resources, 144 pp., US \$10.

Harry Antonides

Many of us are perplexed about the phenomenon of radical Islam, which seems to have come out of nowhere to hit us with stunning ferocity. Islam has forced itself onto the world stage in a way that is unavoidable and without precedent. Yet, questions abound, and we are inundated with conflicting information and answers.

What is the real message of the Koran? Whence the hatred spouted by the likes of Osama bin Laden and his millions of admirers? Why is the Israel/Palestine conflict seemingly without a solution? Is the Islamization of Europe inevitable?

The questions go on and on; and so do the confusion and division about the answers to them. The biggest challenge is to find trustworthy information and true insight about Islam and its impact on the world.

This is where the life and work of the Rev. Bassam and Shirley Madany in their joint ministry to the Arab world fills a very important role. Bassam Madany was born in Syria, received his early education there, emigrated to the U.S. in 1950, trained for the ministry, and preached the Gospel to the Arab world on the Back to God Hour radio broadcast for 36 years until his retirement in 1994. He and his wife Shirley maintain an Internet ministry focused on Islam and the Middle East.*

Previously, Bassam Madany published *The Bible and Islam: Sharing God's Word With a Muslim* (reviewed in this paper August 2, 2004). Their most recent joint publication, *An Introduction to Islam*, consists of 33 chapters of interviews, reviews and essays, dealing with every important facet of Islam, its relationship to Christianity, and its impact on the Western democracies.

The reader is introduced to a slew of titles and authors, as well as a few documentaries and films dealing with Islam, such as the following: *Islam is More Than a Religion*; *Islam and War*; *Jesus in the Qur'an*; *Missions to Muslims in the Twenty-First Century*; *Muslims and Christians in Dialogue*; *The Muslim Challenge to the West*; *What You need to Know About Islam and Muslims*; *The Attraction of Islam*; and *In Depth: A Conversation with Bernard Lewis*.

Islam is More than a Religion

One of the most important facts about Islam, ironically the hardest to understand by secularized Westerners, is that it is more than a religion. Many commentators tend to ignore this reality and therefore do not understand the depth of conviction (fanaticism) of believing Muslims. This

is why so much of the public discussion about Islam misses the point.

Bassam Madany explains that Islam views religion, culture and politics as one indivisible entity. It rejects the idea of the separation of "church" and state. Instead, it has an exclusivist political worldview and therefore has "no room for non-Muslim entities (i.e., states) to freely exist within the context of the Household of Islam." (195) It is this theocratic notion of politics that makes Islam an "imperialistic religion with imperialistic designs." (163)

The migration of millions of Muslims to the West is occurring at a time when the West, especially Europe, is in the process of cutting its ties with its Judeo-Christian heritage. This is what makes for a confusing picture for these new immigrants. They tend to remain isolated from the mainstream and to find their identity in their religion while around them they see moral decadence and spiritual confusion. They are convinced that Islam is the superior religion that has answers for all that is wrong with the West.

But the contrast with Islam goes deeper. Islam presents itself as the superior religion because it is based on the latest and perfect expression of God's law for all times and for the entire world. Although the first centuries after its founding by the prophet Muhammad in 622 was a time of political conquest and cultural enrichment, during the last 500 years Islam has suffered decline and conquest. It blames the West and modernization for the poverty and the lack of development within the Arab world.

The result is that the mindset taught by the proponents of radical Islam is absolute confidence in their world-embracing mission combined with revenge toward the West, which they blame for their own backwardness. The chapters in this *Introduction* provide fascinating insights about this background of what now constitutes one of the most complex and dangerous challenges for the Western democracies.

Introduction is very good at helping us to become better acquainted with the history of Islam as well as its main, immutable source of inspiration, the Koran. The latter is held to be holy and infallible because the prophet Muhammad, so it is claimed, received it directly from God (Allah). Pious Muslims accept the Koran to be the only and all-inclusive authority for faith, worship, and morality. This exclusivist view lies behind the belief that all man-made laws



Bassam Madany doing the Back to God Arabic broadcast years ago

are an attempt to defy Allah's authority and therefore amount to blasphemy, a sin worthy of death.

Why they hate us

This central article of their faith explains that ultimately radical Muslims do not hate us because of what we have done but for who we are. In other words, they do not just hate the hedonism and crime within the West, but they consider us Infidels (especially Christians and Jews, but all other non-Muslims). As the authors of *Introduction* explain, according to the Islamic worldview, the world is divided into two realms: "The Household of Islam" versus "The Household of War". This belief makes the hatred between radical Muslims and all "others" so irreconcilable.

Oddly, refusal to face this reality is now deemed to be the better part of wisdom in the West. This notion is very much at work in the Western media and the academy and it has even infected the Christian churches. Bassam Madany describes how this is happening, and he refers to two films shown on U.S. television and used in public schools. Many of you may have watched *Islam: Empire of Faith and Legacy of the Prophet Muhammad*. Madany writes about the former: "One can hardly believe the shocking revisionism, distortions, and omissions that are replete in this account of the history of Islam." (197)

In the same category are some non-Muslims who are seen as authorities and in fact serve as apologists for Islam, including John Esposito and the former Roman Catholic nun, Karen Armstrong.

On the other side, the authors mention a number of outstanding experts and critics of Islam who provide helpful information and insights, including Robert Spencer, Wolfgang Pannenberg, Peter Riddell, Peter Cotterell, Bat Ye'or, Bernard Lewis, and many others.

Bassam Madany singles out for special attention the amazingly gifted missionary and prolific author, Samuel M. Zwemer (1867-1952) whom he calls "Defender of Apostolic Missions." Zwemer authored more than fifty books and was the founder and editor of the journal, *The Moslem World*. He knew Arabic very well and delighted in explaining the claims of the Christian faith to inquiring Muslims.

The Madanys take issue with those Christians who advise that we must proclaim a "pluralist" or contextualized kind of Christianity and downplay the fundamental difference between the Bible and the Koran. These "modern" Christians think that we should adjust the biblical message by making it more in tune with the notion of tolerance and inclusiveness. Bassam and Shirley Madany explain why the age-old message of salvation by grace alone is the only one entrusted to the Christian Church.

They do a masterful job in showing the difference between the biblical message of a loving God and salvation by grace versus the Koranic teachings about salvation by works and by conquest. This message comes through most clearly in the second book listed.

Voices from the Arab world

Muslims Meeting Christ is edited and mostly written by Shirley Madany, containing a large number of testimonies from listeners to the Arabic language Back to God Hour radio broadcasts. The last chapter tells the story of this mission to the Arab world beginning in 1958. Chapter 2 consists of a 1975 conference speech by Bassam Madany, "The Changing Situation in Islam."

Chapter 8, "Pioneering in Arabia," is the story of a remarkable missionary of the Reformed Church of America, Cornelia Dalenberg (1893-1988) who spent more than 50 years in the Arab world. Her speech "The Cross of Christ in Arabia," presented in 1936, is a moving description of the hardship and spiritual poverty she encountered. It is above all a story of faith and the power of God's love to heal and redeem those lost in darkness and fear.

In his 1975 speech Bassam Madany began by reminding his audience of the character of Islam and the circumstances that contributed to its rise since the mid-seventh century. He said:

Of all the great world religions, Islam is uniquely anti-Christian. It has always been a formidable enemy of our faith since it denies every fundamental Christian doctrine. The

Ecclesiastes

The light of consciousness and the darkness of death

greatest tragedy in the history of the world is that things could have been otherwise, and that Islam may never have arisen – had the early church been more concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Arabs. If only the church had given them the Word of God.

It was not until the early nineteenth century that the Christian churches began a robust mission outreach to Muslims by making the Bible and other Christian literature available in Arabic. But traditional Christian missions in Islamic countries came to a virtual halt after the Second World War. In 1955 Madany had to discontinue his mission work in Syria. But shortly after that, a whole new era of proclaiming the gospel by radio to the Arab world opened up.

Muslims Meeting Christ is really a testament to the love and dedication of Bassam and Shirley Madany in proclaiming the Good News to the Muslim world via radio, old-fashioned mail, and now through the Internet. The responses from the listeners in many Arabic-speaking countries, which make up the bulk of this book, are heart-warming confirmation of the power of God's Word to change hearts and lives in the most unlikely places and circumstances.

The moving testimonies in this book constitute only a small fraction of the thousands of letters received each year. All of them convey a deep sense of longing for truth and inner peace. Most of them spoke of the radical difference between what they had been taught and what they now learned first-hand about the real teachings of the Bible.

These respondents to the Gospel message were anxious to learn more about their newfound faith, and their letters were filled with questions and requests for the Bible and other study materials in their own language. The sentiment most often expressed is one of tremendous thankfulness for the new sense of hope and freedom they had begun to enjoy. For the first time, they received true answers to the deepest questions of life.

These two books provide a great deal of information and insight about the history and character of Islam at a time of apprehension and confusion, also within the Christian community. Above all, they confirm that where the truth of the Bible is diligently proclaimed and lived, hatred makes way for love, and fear and despair are replaced by courage and hope.

These timely and clearly written books deserve a place of honor in every Church and Christian school library, as well as in every Christian family.

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For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing.

Ecclesiastes 9:5a

A. A. van Ruler

No matter how the course and destiny of human lives may differ, in the end we suffer the same destiny. We share the common destiny of death.

As the Preacher sees it, this is "evil" because life is better than death. "Even a live dog is better off than a dead lion," he says. In the East the dog was a despised animal, while the lion was respected as the king of the wild. So this saying suggests that it is better to be unimportant and lowly – and alive – than to be high and mighty and dead.

This underlines the depth of his conviction that life is better than death, for "anyone who is among the living has hope." (vs 4); in other words, he still has something to look forward to. As long as there is life, there is hope. Conversely, it is hope that gives us life.

Our text examines the notion that life is better than death from still another angle. It examines it not in terms of the future and expectation but in terms of consciousness. At least the living *know* that they will die, but the dead know nothing. It contrasts the light of life with the darkness of death. The light of life consists in knowledge, in consciousness.

Consciousness and expectation, light and the future, knowledge and hope are, of course, related. However, to describe just how they are related is no easy matter. Do we have our expectation of the future because we have the light of consciousness? Or is it the other way around: does our hope for the future create the light of consciousness, since it defines the present by distinguishing itself from the present? To put it more simply, do we look forward because we are conscious of the present, or are we conscious of the present because we look forward? The two are, of course, closely related, but that doesn't answer the question. It is a matter of where we put the emphasis – on the future or on consciousness, on time or on reason, on action or on thought. This is why the question of how they are related is so important.

Meanwhile, we are faced with the fact that the Preacher locates the advantage of life over death in human consciousness. The latter is, indeed, a tremendously important reality. And often we don't stop to marvel at it. Only the philosophically inclined linger over it. In fact, there are philosophers who are so astonished by it that they spend a lifetime reflecting on this mystery, namely, that we human beings not only exist alongside other things but that we also have knowledge of all those other things, that we are conscious of them, and that we are also conscious of ourselves and

of our own existence.

The latter is, perhaps, the greatest mystery of all: that human beings are conscious of themselves. In fact, it looks as if in self-consciousness the subject and the passive object of knowledge coincide. It is at the very least highly remarkable, and one might say that it even appears impossible.

But the Preacher does not discuss consciousness in general terms. He speaks specifically of the consciousness of death as the hallmark of the living. The living know that they will die. Is it a morbid irony or despairing pessimism on the part of the Preacher that he locates the advantage of life over death in the fact that the living at least know that they will die?

We must not be too quick to come to such a critical judgment here. Many contemporary philosophers have come to similar conclusions. Human existence, says Heidegger, is a being-unto-death. We all know this. It is the spark of consciousness. It is the beginning of human existence. Our future is death and this future gives rise to human consciousness.

Poets, too, have always been aware of this. It is one of the things they speak of most often. The coming of death is not just a topic for pulpit-pounding preachers to instill fear in their congregations. Death is simply a fact of which all those who stop to reflect are aware.

Along with the philosophers and poets, we must also align believers, the children of God. Not just because they are accustomed to seeing their entire lives in the perspective of death. Although, it is true, that reflection on death is the catalyst for all piety.

But it is a hallmark of all piety, especially of deep piety, to be strongly oriented to consciousness. It is not the philosopher's kind of consciousness – that of thought; or the

poet's consciousness – that of feeling. But it is above all the consciousness of praise. This is the heart of all piety: that we remember that we are here to praise our Creator. We can only do this if we are conscious.

This is one reason death is offensive. But even sleep can be offensive to piety, because we cannot praise God when we are sleeping. The Dutch theologian Theodorus a Brakel fought off sleep as long as possible to enable himself to taste more of the sweetness of praising God. But, of course, he couldn't keep it up for very long.

I suggest that we take all these reflections on life in the light of consciousness and its preferableness over the darkness of death as the Preacher presents them. We must allow them to sink in.

We might object that the Preacher seems a bit short-sighted, for he cannot seem to see past death. He seems to lack any knowledge of an hereafter, of immortality, or of the true life of the human spirit. He also knows nothing of the victory over death in Christ's resurrection. All this is true, but does this mean that what he does say isn't true? The New Testament does not contradict him. It tells us that death is such a dark and hostile reality that it took nothing less than the death and resurrection of God the Son in the flesh to defeat death.

What the resurrection – victory over death – means we will never wholly understand. This is why it is useful to deepen our knowledge of what it is that has been defeated. And in this the reflections of the Preacher, which at first glance seem so depressing and bleak, are very helpful. We must become aware that death is darkness and that the light of life is better so that we may become more aware what it means that in Christ death has been defeated.



Banier with steel

Mission

Nigerian Bible scholars address corruption

Adrian and Wendy Helleman

Conferences are not supposed to start this way.

After nine hours on the road we finally arrived in Ekpoma. There we stood at the university gate with what little luggage we had, looking for a vehicle to take us into the campus to register. It was raining. We soon learned that the conference was to be held at a motel about a kilometer away.

A car drove up and offered to take us, but the driver wanted the equivalent of C\$5 for the short ride on the university grounds, and another \$5 to take us to the motel. Our Nigerian colleague pleaded and bargained with him, but only managed to get the total reduced to \$8, which is still about five times the normal rate. This was extortion. No doubt, the driver took advantage of the rain (when most taxis hide), and decided that our white skin represented a fat wallet.

It seemed an ominous beginning for the annual conference of the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS), held at Ambrose Alli University in the small town of Ekpoma in southern Nigeria. But perhaps it was an appropriate introduction to the theme of this conference: "Biblical Studies and Corruption in Africa."

Most of the fifty scholars who attended this three-day conference (July 11-14) came from the southern and western regions of Nigeria; besides two of us Canadians, there were also five scholars who had come all the way from South Africa specifically for this conference.

The invitation had a list of suggested topics, using biblical themes and passages from the Old or New Testament as a basis for addressing corruption. Indeed, many papers followed these recommendations by looking at corruption as addressed by prophets like Jeremiah or Amos; examining corrupt kings like Ahab, or deceitful characters like Jacob and Laban; and probing corruption in the early church, as represented by Ananias and Sapphira or Simon the sorcerer. Other papers took a more positive approach in analyzing the Biblical themes of justice and righteousness, and the models of leadership given in Acts (selection of deacons) or by Paul in his advice to churches. Alongside these short presentations the organizers had commissioned a number of well-established scholars to give papers on topics like the roots of corruption in human nature (Gen. 3), on Jesus' pronouncements on wealth in the context of the wildly popular in Nigeria 'health and wealth gospel,' the task of a Christian when the government is corrupt, or the sons of Eli and Samuel as corrupt priests.

The papers not only touched on a wide variety of Bible passages but also covered the topic of corruption from various angles, whether in terms of corruption of rulers and governing officials, in corporate finance or academic work, and in terms of employer-

employee relationships, gender relationships, and family or social structures.

It was an eye-opener for us to observe Nigerians openly discussing this topic that touches every aspect of their lives. Corruption is rife in the state but it has also invaded the church. It extends from the minor extortion at police road checks, all the way to leaders who think nothing of salting away billions of dollars in overseas bank accounts. The statistics presented were mind-boggling. Unfortunately, most papers majored on diagnosis.



The Hellemans

with far less offered as prescriptions to remedy the situation.

When pressed for a solution, people here often respond with a shrug, "What can we do?" The principles of civil society barely function in this country. For decades its leaders have encouraged ethnicity as basis for hiring and advancement, using the principle of 'divide and rule' to retain power. Change is indeed difficult, as most Nigerians recognize. So it is not surprising that the oratory was not matched by calls to action.

In his paper Adrian did call for change in Nigerian society, from top to bottom, but it is easy for him to say this, since he is not a Nigerian. If things get too hot, as expatriates we can leave, whereas our colleagues must stay and face the music. In spite of the danger, most presenters were not afraid to expose corruption. They boldly drew lines

from the Bible to the current situation. But few papers were based on strong exegetical study; most scholars moved quickly from an introductory survey of the book and passage, to drawing parallels with the Nigerian context. This was a weakness of many presentations; they neglected the necessary careful Bible study so as to anchor their conclusions more firmly in the biblical passages.



A conference participant

considering the theme of corruption. The commissioned papers too were of uneven quality. Considering that these were among the top biblical scholars in Nigeria, we expected more.

As time permitted, presentations were followed by lively discussion, with comments and critique on both stylistic and substantive issues. It was interesting for us to observe older professors, especially those from Nigeria's first university in Ibadan, take a leading role in such responses. Our own presentations (Adrian focused on basic biblical principles to guard against corrup-

tion, while Wendy examined Wisdom literature for advice on justice), sandwiched in part of a large group of non-commissioned papers, were quite well received. Every participant was urged to note criticisms and to rework their papers for publication. Each year the association publishes these papers as a book, and any extra articles are used in the journal of the association. In this way

Nigerian biblical scholars have an opportunity to get their work published, which is necessary for promotion.

Although we had gotten word about the conference only a few weeks earlier, we decided to attend and participate, particularly because it would give us a chance to meet biblical scholars from all over Nigeria, and thus have a better sense of the larger academic context of our work at Unijos. We really appreciated meeting colleagues from the leading universities, and sensed that the feeling was mutual. This is crucial in a context where personal relationships

are paramount, and communication is still largely by word of mouth, by mobile phone, and perhaps by email. NABIS is one of the few academic associations in Nigeria that meets regularly and does its work in a professional and responsible manner. It was good for us to witness this first hand. We have tried (and consistently failed) to get in touch with similar Nigerian associations in theology or philosophy.

For the presence of South African scholars was a bonus, since we soon discovered that we had numerous

mutual acquaintances (especially Bennie Vander Walt), and many shared our reformational approach in scholarly work. But it was also interesting to witness the effort on the part of our Nigerian colleagues to strengthen ties with South African Christian scholars. In terms of resources, such as library facilities, and technical support for academic work, South Africa can be of real help.

The many benefits of attending this conference thus more than compensated for some of the hardships we faced in traveling and in accommodations. The motel used as venue was not expensive, but the service left much to be desired. We rarely had electricity, except when provided by a generator for a few hours in the evenings. Food was both too expensive and of poor quality. Most Nigerians had brought their own provisions. Fortunately for us, a fast-food outlet 500 me-

A questioner

Mission

Mbudi za ndokotora, July 2006

Rob Greidanus

It has been a while since I've written about my medical adventures here in Rundu. I could use the excuse that I've been busy. That is true, but there is a better reason. My defense is the fact that I'm struggling to find words suitable to depict what I'm experiencing here. Life in Namibia is certainly not dull, but some days my medical adventures are just beyond description. I'll try to give you a glimpse of that today with some highlights and lowlights from the last month. Last time I wrote about three incredible miracles that I experienced in one amazing day. Well, a short time ago, I witnessed another miracle that overshadowed those three.

I was on call one night when the phone rang at 2 a.m. informing me of a predicament on maternity ward. There was a young primigravida (expecting her first baby) that had labored at home for almost two days before coming to our hospital. She was young and unmarried like so many of the obstetrical patients in Rundu. However, she was also mentally handicapped and suffering from what was later thought to be schizophrenia.

The nurse on the phone said that they were unable to hear the baby's heart beat and were quite certain the fetus was dead. They had even listened with our only electronic fetal heart monitor and were still unable to detect any signs of life. In addition, the baby's arm was presenting down the birth canal and was swollen and discolored.

The nurse asked, "Since the baby is dead, should we wait until morning to deliver her by caesarian section?" I replied that we bet-

ter not wait any longer because of the risks that prolonged obstructive labor could pose to the mother. We called the theatre staff in, but it was over an hour until they arrived so that I could start the surgery.

While waiting, I was able to assess the patient myself. I could not auscultate a fetal heart beat. The baby was indeed being pushed sideways down the birth canal with an impacted arm leading the way. I prepared myself for a difficult operative delivery.

The surgery was challenging to say the least. With some struggling I was able to deliver this baby boy. He was limp and lifeless. I could feel no pulsations in the umbilical cord and there were no spontaneous movements or breathing efforts. I solemnly handed him off to the nurse. She listened for a heart beat by stethoscope and there was none. His color and tone suggested he had been dead for some time already.

He was pronounced 'still born' and no resuscitation was even attempted. The nurse silently laid him down on a blanket in the corner of the operating room as I continued on with the surgery.

About five minutes later the stillness in the room was broken by a startled nurse who shouted, "Dr. Rob, I think the baby just took a breath!"

We all looked over at the baby with skepticism. Seconds later we witnessed the inconceivable - he was indeed trying to breathe.

Alright, it is 3:30 in the morning, maybe I'm just dreaming. But this was no dream or hallucination, we were witnessing something miraculous. The anesthetist ran over and started resuscitating him with oxygen.

Nigerian conference ... continued from p. 11

ters from the motel provided decent meals at a reasonable price. Conference organizers always face a dilemma in finding accommodations that are affordable for the scholars they would like to attract, while at the same time providing a venue that is conducive to good discussion and interaction.

Our return trip to Jos is a story all by itself. We had reserved three seats in a station wagon leaving Ekpoma by 8:30 a.m., so that we could arrive in Jos before dark. Given misleading stories about the car (which had a breakdown on the way to Ekpoma, as we discovered later), we waited hours in the rain. It was almost noon when we were given the option of joining a minibus holding about 15 people.

While grateful for the belated arrival of the bus, we were apprehensive about arriving in Jos so late in the day. Driving at night here is dangerous, especially because of the threat of armed robbery. In fact, the last three hours of our trip took us on dark winding roads, with fog in some sections, and with driving rain as we got close to Jos.

In Nigeria we never travel anywhere without praying for God's protection. We are thankful that our prayers were answered.

We arrived at our home safely about 10 p.m. But we had no regrets about attending this conference. On the contrary, we are grateful to God for the many positive encounters we had, and we pray that these may bear fruit in our ongoing work in Nigeria.

Adrian and Wendy Helleman are both (visiting) professors in the department of Religious Studies at the University of Jos, Nigeria; they are missionaries, sent by Christian Studies International (sister organization in Canada of the Kansas-based International Institute for Christian Studies), and also work in Nigeria as 'partners' with Christian Reformed World Missions.

CONTRIBUTIONS

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Web site:
www.christianstudiesinternational.ca.



Namibian children on school grounds

The rest of us looked on in disbelief. Within moments the room was filled with the wonderful cry of newborn life. Incredible!

"How can this be?" my scientific mind argued. He was dead by every means that we have to define physical death. Even if our electronic fetal heart monitor betrayed us during labor, I delivered a baby with no signs of life and he lay on the table for at least five minutes without any movement or breathing.

"Well, there must be brain damage from all those minutes, possibly hours without oxygen," was my next thought. I finished the surgery as quickly as I could and went on to examine this child with my own hands. His left arm was swollen and still looking necrotic from the way it was pinched in the birth canal. Besides that he looked as healthy and perfect as any newborn child could be.

My examination confirmed the implausible. He was very alert and demonstrated great tone and spontaneous movements. He was taking regular breaths, had a strong heart beat, and responded to my prodding with a vigorous cry. "Well," me of little faith thought, "certainly he is going to develop some problems after this extremely difficult start to life. You can't just have an apgar score of zero at one and five minutes and then go on and be perfectly normal," I argued with myself.

But my observations over the next few days only convinced me more emphatically that this was indeed a miracle. This 'boy wonder' never did go on to develop neonatal seizures or show any other signs of brain injury. He fed energetically and responded appropriately to all of my repeated examinations and observations. Amazingly, even his left arm which was almost necrotic returned to normal color and started to have typical movement and function.

This phenomenal baby was not out of the woods yet, however. His mother be-

came acutely psychotic a few days after her surgery. On a few occasions she tried to leave the hospital against medical advice. She demonstrated very bizarre behavior on the ward and I was worried about the safety of this little boy. For example, during rounds one morning we witnessed the mother feeding on her own breast. Meanwhile, the baby was lying next to her crying with hunger.

"How many obstacles does this baby overcome to live?" I blurted out loud to the nurse. "Someone needs to look out for this baby otherwise it is doomed for sure."

With the nurses' help, I eventually was able to track down the mother's family. The patient's sister showed interest and concern for her and the baby. I told her the miraculous account of her nephew's apparent death and 'rebirth' to life. I told her that I believed his life was amazingly preserved for a reason and that I was worried he would not survive without some vigilant intervention from the family.

She was thankful for the miraculous course of events and promised to take an active role in watching over her sister and caring for the baby. She demonstrated this on the ward over the next few days and even her sister's psychosis responded favorably to her presence. They have all been discharged home now and to my knowledge are doing well. Please pray that God will continue to sustain and protect this miracle child through all the potential challenges ahead.

Let's now move on from the highlights to the lowlights. There are a series of cases over the last month that are weighing heavy on my heart. Some days the despair and hopelessness felt by women and children of Namibia is just so vivid. The following patients are examples of that despondency.

Recently, a 9-year-old came in with her mother to our gynecology clinic and saw one of my colleagues. Examination revealed

Continued on page 17...

History

The Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis:

the leading Christian bestseller of all times

Gerry Gerrits

Nowadays one hears a great deal about books that are bestsellers, including Christian bestsellers, but the leading Christian bestseller of all times is *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. Written nearly 600 years ago, *The Imitation of Christ* is to this day still the most widely sought after, and read, work by Christians after the Bible itself.

Thomas à Kempis was born around 1380 in Kempen, a town in the Duchy of Gelderland that, at the time, straddled the present-day Dutch-German border. At the age of ten, Thomas left his hometown for Deventer to be educated at the famous Latin school attached to St. Lebuin's (Lebuin's) Church, the main church in Deventer. In 1399 he entered the monastery of Augustinian Canons Regular at Mount Saint Agnes (Agnietenberg), lying just north of the city of Zwolle on the Vecht River, and it was here that he died in 1471, being either 91 or 92 at the time. It was also here that he completed *The Imitation of Christ* sometime in the 1420s.

The fame of *The Imitation of Christ* has made Thomas à Kempis the best known member of the Modern Devotion, a religious reform movement that was begun by Gerard Grote of Deventer around 1380, and that spread from Holland to Germany, Belgium, northern France and, to a lesser extent, Spain. Often regarded as the last attempt to reform the church before Luther appeared on the scene, the Modern Devotion has received much attention from historians during the past two hundred years as a possible forerunner of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.

Organizationally, the Modern Devotion consisted of two branches: the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life, and the Augustinian Canons and Canonesses Regular of the Congregation (a group of monasteries) of Windesheim. Windesheim is a small town just south of Zwolle where the mother house of the Congregation was located, and the monastery of Mount Saint Agnes (Agnietenberg), Thomas' home for most of his life, belonged to the Congregation of Windesheim.

The Imitation of Christ enjoyed an enormous popularity from the very beginning as is proven by the more than 800 fifteenth-century manuscripts of this work that have survived and the more than 120 editions in seven languages that had left the printing presses by the beginning of the Protestant Reformation: i.e., less than seventy-five years after the invention of the printing press. By the 1950s, *The Imitation of Christ* had gone through approximately 3000 editions, with translations into at least ninety-five languages, and by the end of the last century the total number of editions had doubled, reaching some 6000. In a recent monograph on the Scriptural sources of



The Imitation of Christ, Kenneth Becker provides a list of some people who read, advocated and were influenced by this work, and it reads like a real *Who's Who* of the past 500 years. However, *The Imitation of Christ* has conquered not only the barriers of time, but religious barriers as well, for it is read not only by Christians, but also by Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and Muslims, as well as by those who profess to hold no religious convictions. By the 1950s, it had been translated into 95 languages.

Just a few of the better known historical figures who read *The Imitation of Christ* are Erasmus, Jacob Cats, John Wesley, King William I of Holland, Leo Tolstoy, William Gladstone, Edward Pusey, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Dag Hammarskjöld, C.S. Lewis and popes John XXIII and John Paul II. Just these few names reveal that *The Imitation of Christ* was, and is, read by a wide variety of people, although it is safe to say that in the Christian world it is better known amongst Catholics than amongst Protestants, and Martin Luther himself may be partly responsible for this. For Luther was quite familiar with *The Imitation of Christ*, perhaps a consequence of having lived with the Brothers of the Common Life in Magdeburg for a year, and it has been argued that he was influenced by it quite profoundly, only to reject it later on the grounds that it "conceals a doctrine of works." That John Calvin knew, and read, *The Imitation of Christ* is virtually certain, for he studied theology for a time at the Collège de Montaigu in Paris, an institution that was in the early 16th century quite heavily influenced by the Modern Devotion. However, the impact of the *The Imitation of Christ*, and of the Modern Devotion, on Calvin has been judged variously from substantial to nil.

Those familiar with the history of *The Imitation of Christ* are, of course, all too familiar with the authorship question that has raged around this work almost from

the very beginning. For at a very early date it was also attributed to Jean Gerson, one time Chancellor of the University of Paris, who lived from 1363 to 1429. Early in the seventeenth century a third major candidate for the authorship of the *Imitation of Christ* was brought forward, namely one Giovanni Gersen (sounds suspiciously like Jean Gerson), an Italian abbot, but there is no solid evidence that such a person ever existed. In the second half of the 19th century linguists demonstrated quite conclusively that the Latin of *The Imitation of Christ* contains enough Dutchisms to make Thomas à Kempis the best candidate for the authorship of this famous work.

In the first half of the 20th century George Udny Yule, a British statistician with a literary bent, undertook a statistical analysis of the vocabulary of *The Imitation of Christ*, comparing it with the vocabulary of Thomas' other works and the vocabulary found in the writings of Jean Gerson, the other chief contender in the authorship debate, and Yule's conclusion supports the conclusion arrived at by the 19th century linguists. Furthermore, comparisons of the contents of *The Imitation of Christ* with that of other writings by members of the Modern Devotion have revealed that the spirituality of *The Imitation* is of a piece with that of the Modern Devotion. Consequently, Thomas à Kempis' authorship of *The Imitation of Christ* is now accepted by all, with the exception of a few Italians who continue to put forward Giovanni Gersen, a fictitious figure by all accounts, as the author. In the 1950s Jacobus Huijben and Pierre Debongnie summed up the lengthy, and sometimes acrimonious, debate about the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ* in a comprehensive work entitled *L'Auteur ou les Auteurs de L'Imitation*.

The irony in all of this is that Thomas à Kempis himself writes that what counts is what is said, not who said it. This characterizes him as a pre-Renaissance man, for before the Renaissance (c. 1350-1530) all ideas and knowledge were deemed to originate with God and were not, in the final analysis, regarded as the product of human genius and the human intellect. It was in the Renaissance that such claims were first made, and which were to lead to the ideas of copyright and intellectual property, concepts that would have been inconceivable in the Middle Ages.

This very same Medieval understanding of the origin of all knowledge was responsible, in part at least, for the debate swirling around the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ*, for it made Medieval authors very careless about signing their writings, or claiming authorship for them. Likewise, the theory that all ideas and knowledge find their origin in God, led Medieval authors to copy or quote freely from other writers without always acknowledging their sources, or doing so quite carelessly. The concept of pla-

giarism simply did not exist (In the Middle Ages Dan Brown would not have been taken to court and charged with stealing ideas for his book *The Da Vinci Code*), and it did not emerge until the Renaissance as a consequence of the new theory regarding the origin of ideas and knowledge.

This last question is raised here, for although Thomas à Kempis is now generally regarded as the author of *The Imitation of Christ* in its present form, it has been argued that he was not the author of the original version of this work. In the 1930s and 1940s Jacobus van Ginneken held that it was Gerard Grote (1340-1384), the founder of the Modern Devotion, while in the 1950s Albert Hyma asserted that it was Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen (1367-1398), an early, and prominent, member of the movement. They held that Thomas à Kempis took an existing work and rewrote it, resulting in *The Imitation of Christ* as it has been known since the 1420s. That Thomas borrowed from earlier writers is indisputable, but the extent to which he did, and the degree to which *The Imitation of Christ* is an original work, is very difficult to determine.

In purely literary terms, *The Imitation of Christ* has been classified by some scholars as belonging to the literary genre known as *rapiaria* (pl.). *Rapiaria* were collections of sayings, aphorisms, adages, and the like, and in the Middle Ages they appear to have first been compiled by Latin school and university students for their own, private educational use and purposes. Florens Radewijns (c. 1350 - 1400), a co-founder of the Modern Devotion, is credited with having adapted the *rapiarium* (sing.) to the religious life, and following him all members of the Modern Devotion were urged to compile a *rapiarium* for their own, private, spiritual use.

The proverbs, aphorisms, sayings and excerpts making up the *rapiaria* were drawn from a variety of sources such as the Bible, sermons, and religious literature, but also included edifying and practical observations made by fellow members of the Modern Devotion. Furthermore, there are strong indications that the members of the Modern Devotion also drew on the *rapiaria* of their companions. Most of the *rapiaria* drawn up by members of the Modern Devotion appear to have been pretty simple and unsophisticated, as well as lacking in organization, and practically all of them have been destroyed and lost. It has been asserted that underlying *The Imitation of Christ* is a *rapiarium*, presumably Thomas à Kempis' own, which he organized into chapters and books, along topical lines, and then gave a poetic form. The original Latin version of *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis is in rhymed couplets, a form that translators have generally not been able to duplicate. Translations are, for the most part, in prose form.

And what about the contents of this fa-

Christian living

mous, and still widely read, work? That question, perhaps not surprisingly, is easier to ask than to answer. What can the title: *The Imitation of Christ*, tell us about the contents of this work? Imitation of Christ was an important theme amongst the members of the Modern Devotion, but it is not a dominant theme in *The Imitation of Christ* – at least it is not expressed explicitly to any degree. In fact, the title *The Imitation of Christ* was not, at first, used universally, but only gradually came to be accepted by all as the title for this work, one that was derived from the title of the first chapter of the first book which reads: “On the Imitation of Christ and Contempt for All the Vanities of This World,” and the book begins with a text from the Gospel of John: “He who follows me shall not walk in darkness,” says our Lord.” (John 8:12). The titles of the four separate books into which *The Imitation of Christ* is divided throw more light on its contents than does the main title, and those four titles are: “Counsels on the Spiritual Life,” “Counsels on the Inner Life,” “On Inward Consolation,” and “On the Blessed Sacrament,” that is to say, Holy Communion. The fourth book, because it deals with a very specific topic, has not always been included in *The Imitation of Christ* and initially the four books probably circulated independently.

If one were to sum up the contents of *Imitation of Christ* in a few words, spiritual detachment from this world comes to mind, and that may explain, in part, the work's popularity amongst world leaders, both past and present, looking for mental (spiritual) detachment from what might otherwise become an intolerable burden. This same spiritual detachment probable helps to explain as well the popularity of Thomas à Kempis' work with Buddhists, for example. However, for Thomas spiritual detachment

from this world is not an end in itself, but it is a precondition for, and leads to, union with Christ, and from that perspective the fourth book of *The Imitation of Christ* can be regarded as being in harmony with the first three books.

In the quest for spiritual detachment from this world and union with Christ, Thomas assigns a role to the believer that Luther equated with work righteousness (which has pretty much become a caricature of Catholic theology), and in the introduction to his translation of *The Imitation of Christ* that dates from the 1930s, the Protestant theologian B. Wielenga, asserts that the ‘problem’ with *The Imitation of Christ* is that in it Thomas gives pride of place to sanctification, rather than to justification, and that in the process of sanctification he assigns too great a role to the believer. Underlying all of this, Wielenga sees a lack emphasis on, and acknowledgement of, human sinfulness and depravity and the believer's consequent inability to contribute to her or his own salvation.

Certainly, if one reads *The Imitation of Christ* from a strictly dogmatic perspective, Protestants might not find it to their liking. However, the work is, in essence, not about dogmatics but about spiritual edification and growth, exuding the spirit of the Gospels, and that is why in the 17th and 18th century it was a favorite with Dutch Reformed Pietists, partly because there was relatively little spiritually edifying literature of a Protestant nature available at that time. And one assumes that the Reformed Pietists were able to appreciate *The Imitation of Christ* because its underlying (dogmatic) tone, although perhaps at odds with Protestant teachings in many respects, is not totally foreign to what they stood for, as is proven, for example, by the title of the last chapter of book three which reads: “We Should Hope and Trust in God Alone.”

In fact, one could argue that *The Imitation of Christ* is not without quietistic qualities in its surrender to the divine. This feature seems to account for the tranquil quality that *The Imitation of Christ* exudes, putting the reader at peace with God, oneself and the world. One reader of *The Imitation of Christ* expressed the view that this work flows along as tranquilly in its spiritual ‘bedding’ as must have the River Vecht, which Thomas perhaps overlooked from his cell, on a warm summer's day. It is this quality of tranquillity that perhaps explains the perennial appeal of *The Imitation of Christ* to people of many and varied backgrounds.

What one does perhaps miss in *The Imitation of Christ* is an expressed concern with the spiritual well-being of one's neighbor: there is little or no sense of the apostolate to be found in this work.

Gerry Gerrits is a professor in the Department of History and Classics at Acadia University, Wolfville, N.S.

The power of music

My window seat

Mendelt Hoekstra



When people hear that I'm a Music Therapist, they often ask, “What do you do?” If you are a teacher, people know what you do. If you are an accountant, people might not know what you do on a daily basis but they know what the profession is. Music Therapy is not yet well known for the general public to have an idea of what it is.

The Canadian Association of Music Therapy (CAMT) defines Music Therapy as the skillful use of music and musical elements by an accredited music therapist to promote, maintain, and restore mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Music has non-verbal, creative, structural, and emotional qualities. These are used in the therapeutic relationship to facilitate contact, interaction, self-awareness, learning, self-expression, communication, and personal development.

The 20th century discipline began after World War I and World War II when community musicians of all types, both amateur and professional, went to Veterans hospitals to play for the thousands of veterans suffering both physical and emotional trauma from the wars. The patients' notable physical and emotional responses to music led the doctors and nurses to request the hiring of musicians by the hospitals. It was soon evident that the hospital musicians needed some prior training before entering the facility and so the demand grew for a university curriculum. The first music therapy degree program in the world was founded at Michigan State University in 1944.

Music Therapy started as a profession in Canada in 1974 and in the same year Capilano College in British Columbia offered a diploma in Music Therapy. We now have six universities in Canada that offer the degree in Music Therapy.

Music can move most people. When some songs are heard they can immediately evoke memories of the past. There are also songs that one can get lost in. Two years ago I was driving down the highway listening to the radio when a song that I knew and enjoyed came on. I started singing on the top of my lungs. Unknown to me, I also stepped harder on the gas pedal and was quickly pulled over by the police. I told the officer my story; that I wasn't speeding until a great song came on the radio and I was taken away by it. The officer told me that he had heard that excuse

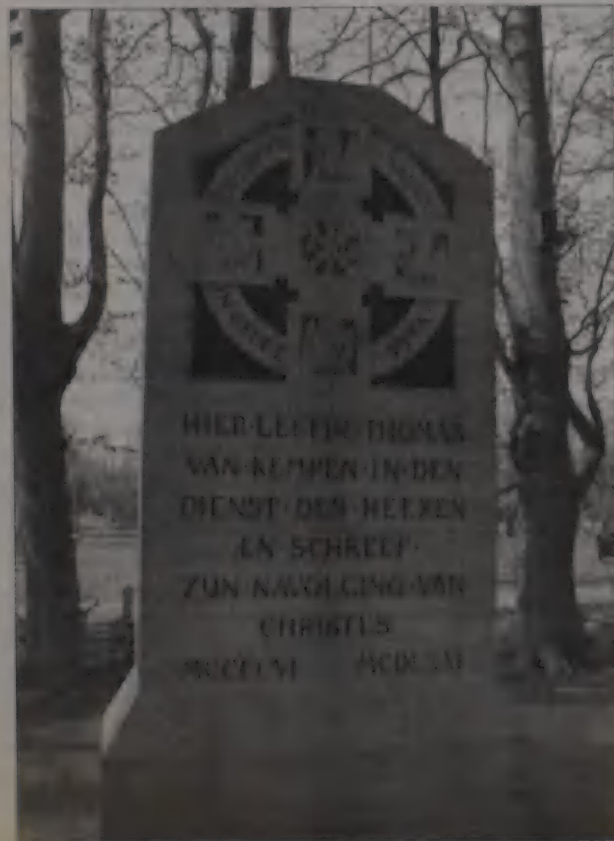
before and that he did believe it. I still got the ticket.

It has been said that music soothes the savage beast. I'm not sure about that but I do know that when used properly music can move hearts and promote individual growth. Perhaps the first Music Therapist was David who is written about in I Samuel 16. He was called to take his harp to play for Saul and when he did this “relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.” (I Sam. 16:23)

I've seen Music Therapy sessions change lives. One example of that is Kevin. Kevin is in his mid 40's and until five years ago was living in a psychological prison of depression and self worthlessness. From the time he was a child he was told by his father and the rest of his family that he was “stupid, dumb and worthless”. If anyone hears these words for a period of more than 30 years, it is natural to believe it. Kevin believed these words and for years uttered them to himself countless times per day. Most of his days were spent sleeping or by himself. He was disinterested in most interactions and did very little in an average day. While you and I might leave the house several times in the same day, Kevin left the house very little. In fact, when Kevin was first recommended for Music Therapy, the sessions only worked at his house because he was disinterested and uncomfortable in leaving his house.

The sessions started with music that Kevin was interested in: Stompin' Tom Connors and the theme song from Hockey Night in Canada. These songs turned into improvisations on how great Kevin was and how much he had to offer the world. Kevin connected well with these songs and began to sing them to himself outside the sessions. After a few sessions, staff heard him say something positive about himself for the first time. He now lives a life full of activities, fun and of course, weekly Music Therapy sessions.

Mendelt D. Hoekstra is the founder and director of the Music Therapy program at Bethesda, an organization owned and operated by the Mennonite Brethren Conference, that supports adults with developmental possibilities. He lives in Vineland, ON with Marisa and their three children



Sociology of the church

Church growth and the clustering of congregations

David Snapper

How can a strong church with a clear vision from God expand its ministry boundaries without weakening itself. It needs help from neighboring churches. Most Christian Reformed Church (CRC) congregations are located within a 20 mile drive of another CRC congregation. Similarly, most CRC individuals worship in a church that is near another CRC. These two facts are so self-evident that their significance may escape our attention.

Does it make a difference that congregations are located near one another, for example, within twenty miles? Is it beneficial for the congregations and their growth? Do they enhance one another's ministry as iron sharpens iron? Or does proximity promote unhealthy competition?

In this article I will present a perspective on the CRC's pattern of building churches in groups — groups that I call "clusters." I will show that these clusters are not harmful but, in fact, have been and continue to be a source of denominational strength. I will conclude by describing some valuable ministry options afforded by clusters.

Clusters and the CRC

Most CRC congregations and members are found in clusters. What is a cluster? There is no "official" definition of a cluster — I invented the term to describe what is common in the CRC. A cluster of CRC congregations is a grouping of three or more congregations in which each congregation resides within 20 miles of at least one of the other two (or more).

That is, if you draw an imaginary circle with a 20-mile radius around one CRC, and inside that circle you find at least three CRCs, then you have a cluster. If you expand the circle to include every CRC within 20 miles of the cluster, the final cluster may be large (ten or more CRCs) or small (only 3 CRCs). On the other hand, if you draw that imaginary circle around a congregation and there are no other CRCs inside the circle, then the church in that imaginary circle is isolated. It has no near CRC neighbors.

Why bother with this idea of clusters? Clusters are important to the CRC because very often our own families and relatives, and our spiritual brothers and sisters

live inside a cluster, frequently the same one in which we live. Inside such a cluster it is common, for example, for children to enjoy Sunday dinner with their parents at grandmother's house after church. If you were born and raised in a cluster — say, Pella, Iowa — you know that in Pella you have an identity, classmates, and a home for life. Such is the significance of the cluster. Let's take a look at clusters in the CRC.

Size of clusters

CRC clusters come in different sizes; they can be large or fairly small. Denver is an example of a medium-sized cluster, comprised of ten congregations and about 2,400 members. The average church size is about 240 members.

In southwest British Columbia a cluster of about 5,000 CRC members is found in a web of congregations that is rooted in southern BC, with branches that extend south to Lynden and Bellingham, WA, for a total of nearly 8,000 people. This larger bi-national network includes several congregations, Christian schools and a retirement home.

West Michigan is home to a "cluster of clusters." A remarkable 80,000 CRC people in West Michigan live in such close proximity that about 200 congregations are located within a twenty-minute drive of at least one other CRC. This extensive cluster is bounded, roughly, by Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Holland, and Muskegon.

Clusters in the U.S.A.

Because I am most familiar with churches in the U.S., they will be my primary reference point, though I encourage someone more familiar with the Canadian CRC to do the same research for Canada.

Looking more closely we find the following. Of the 280,000 members which the CRCNA has about approximately 200,000 reside in the USA. Of these, about 80,000 members live in West Michigan. That's an amazing 40 percent of the CRC-USA that lives in one cluster (Classes Grand Rapids South, East, North, Thornapple, Hudsonville, Kalamazoo, Holland, Muskegon, and Zeeland.)

Though nothing else in the USA or Canada compares in size to SW Michigan, many readers will recognize that the following geographic regions also contain many clusters of churches. The number in parentheses represents

the approximate number of CRC persons living in each region.

1. North and South Chicago and NW Indiana: (17,000 members)
2. NW Iowa, SW Minnesota and Dakota: (16,000 members)
3. Greater Los Angeles and South California: (11,000 members)
4. Pella, IA: (6,000 members)

Years ago some of these clusters were more "compact"; over time the suburbanization of cities split single clusters. This brief survey tells us that we thrive in clusters so much that the sum of the CRC-USA members living in just these four areas and in West Michigan represents over 60 percent of CRC-USA.

Five ways in which the cluster affects the local church

First, while individual congregation experience large membership changes, clusters are stable. Within a cluster any one congregation may disband without affecting the membership stability of the cluster. Typically the members of the disbanding congregations often move to another CRC within driving distance. There is, therefore, no net change to the cluster membership.

This process of moving members from a dying church to a thriving church occurs frequently in the clusters. For example, consider Broadway (Grand Rapids) and George (Iowa). Both congregations existed, folded and sent members to neighboring congregations of the cluster with no net change in the size of the cluster. More recently, Burton Heights CRC, in Grand Rapids, Michigan did so too.

Second, clusters are stable. Isolated congregations are volatile. A congregation within a cluster may lose members to or gain members from other congregations within the cluster. The sum total of CRC members remains relatively unchanged in the cluster. The opposite is the case for isolated congregations if a few members decide to leave. Because these congregations are isolated those members who leave will usually be lost to the CRC. Isolated congregations tend to be more volatile than clusters. It more common for an isolated congregation to disband than it is for a cluster.

Third, clusters develop new, large congregations quickly while isolated areas do not. A properly

sited new church in West Michigan typically grows at the rate of at least ten families (40 members) per year until it reaches about 400 members in size. The new members come for a variety of reasons: urban flight, transfer from other CRCs, curiosity, boredom in their former congregation, and new housing developments. These patterns of rapid growth have existed since the earliest days of the CRC.

Isolated congregations rarely grow rapidly. The pool of nearby CRC people is limited, by definition, eliminating transfer growth. Despite huge efforts in evangelism, our isolated congregations rarely are able to grow rapidly as a result of community evangelism. An isolated congregation rarely exceeds 200 members.

Growth by evangelism, whether in isolated or clustered congregations, is rarely the primary cause of rapid growth.

Fourth, clusters tend to have mostly large congregations. Isolated congregations are mostly small. Whether it is the West Michigan, Sioux Center, Pella, or the Langley cluster, the congregations at the heart of the cluster tend to be larger than those at the edge. The larger the cluster, the larger the congregations at the center.

For example, the average membership in Classis Grand Rapids East is over 500 members per congregation, and 14 of 16 churches have more than 300 members. In other words, almost all of the churches are large. In contrast, the 26 mostly isolated congregations in Classis Southeast U.S. (Florida and surrounding states) total only about 2,600 members — averaging 100 members per congregation. Isolation is usually marked by smaller size. Nationally, about 80 percent of isolated congregations never reach 200 members.

This is a simple and accurate comparison between a large cluster and an area of isolated churches: 500 members per congregation at the heart of the West Michigan cluster and 100 members per congregation in Classis Southeast U.S. All the pastors of these churches were trained in the same schools, in the same way, and meet the same high standards for ministry. The major distinguishing factor is isolation. Isolation leads to smaller congregations.

I selected these examples because they accurately represent the power of churches in a cluster.

Wherever we find CRCs, the pattern is that larger congregations are at the center of the cluster and smaller congregations are found near the edge of the cluster.

Fifth, clusters are centripetal while isolated congregations are not. CRC-USA clusters attract CRC people. This is most noticeable in the area of education. All of our larger schools are located in clusters. These larger schools draw talented and gifted staff members who normally join local CRC congregations. The net result is that a cluster has a central-pull for denominational leadership.

Dordt College, for example, has about 100 teaching staff members attending approximately ten or fifteen nearby CRC congregations, averaging about eight to ten teaching staff members per congregation. While these numbers are not precise, the concept is accurate — larger clusters attract CRC people who become part of the cluster. Add to that the staff of the Christian day schools, denominational offices and CRC agencies, and it is clear that the clusters do attract CRC members and their many associated gifts. Clusters attract their own resources.

An isolated congregation could not conceive of being home to ten CRC professors or staff members. People in isolated congregations hope to send their children to Calvin or Dordt or Trinity College and may even hope that their children will remain there on the teaching staff. Isolated congregations can expect to lose members to the clusters.

Clusters are centripetal, especially in the area of education. Even so, the same case can be made for all of the resources of the denomination. In one way or another most resources flow through the administrative offices that are found in the clusters. People who jokingly refer to Grand Rapids as "Jerusalem" express, consciously or not, the centripetal power of the cluster.

Summary and application

What does it mean that CRC congregations normally thrive in clusters? Is this good or bad? Harmful or productive? Do we rejoice at this news or cringe in fear that someone may discover how little real estate we occupy?

The five observations noted above are facts about the CRC

Continued on p. 17...

Mission

Mbudi za ndokotora ... continued from p. 13

that she had a very severe genital herpes infection. This can only be acquired by close sexual contact with someone else that has this infection. I was in disbelief as he was telling me about his findings in this child, but even more shocked when he told me that he could do nothing more than tell the mother the nature of the infection and that there was no treatment he could offer. My other colleague laughed at me when he saw me getting visibly upset about this and said, "Welcome to Africa, my friend."

You see, they insisted that if the parents did not want to pursue things further with the police or social services then nothing could be done about this crime. I saw this girl in follow-up two weeks later when the laboratory tests were back revealing that she was IgG and IgM positive for herpes serotype one and two (basically this just confirmed our suspicion). Her aunt came in with her this time and denied that anyone could have violated this young girl. I told her

that I wanted to see the girl again with her parents, but they have yet to return.

Earlier in that week, I saw two girls, aged 4 and 10 years respectively, with genital condyloma (warts). These, also, could only have been acquired by intimate sexual contact. The family did not seem disturbed by the diagnosis or its implications. The mothers of the children denied the fact that any-

one could have performed a sexual act with their children and left the office not wanting to investigate matters further.

This week I did a laparotomy on an 18-year-old with a large pelvic abscess. She was HIV positive and told me it was because she was raped at the age of 8. No one ever took action on this crime and she now lives with the consequences. Clinically she has AIDS and has been started on anti-retroviral



Children in Rundu

medicines. In addition, surgery revealed that both of her fallopian tubes were scarred from the infection. Not only is she facing a life-threatening illness, she now realizes she will never be able to have children.

In Canada, as a doctor, it would be considered a crime not to report these cases to child welfare. Here the system is not so straight forward. In fact, these cases are

justice and protection for those oppressed by these crimes.

I felt sick to my stomach about these cases and have been making many inquiries since then on how to do something more for these girls. Most avenues I have searched these last weeks have led to dead ends. However, recently, I made contact with a member of the local police force who is responsible for child protection.

I met with him face to face and was encouraged by our meeting. He took my concerns seriously and asked me to give him more information on these patients and any further cases such as these. He seemed genuinely concerned about the welfare of these children and so I am hopeful that some action can be taken in the future to protect them and prevent further abuse.

Before I close, let me share one more very disturbing event. A 16 year old girl delivered a baby in hospital not long ago. Later that same night while on the maternity ward she suffocated and killed her baby with her own hands. She performed this act of murder with no warning signs and with seven other new mothers in beds next to her.

When questioned by the nurses in the morning, she said that she simply awoke and found her baby lying dead next to her. However, this conflicted with the suspicions of her roommates who were silent

eye witnesses. It also conflicted with the thumb shaped bruises found on the baby's neck. The police were informed and made an appearance to the ward.

She was later discharged, and I have yet to learn the outcome of the police enquiries and what charges are being laid. I do know that she eventually admitted to killing her own child. She did not show features of depression or psychosis. The only reasonable explanation she finally gave was that she was unable to care for her baby on her own and felt she had nowhere to turn for help.

I have been tormented by all of these cases. How desperate and hopeless this 16-year-old must have felt that she would take her own baby's life and not even talk to the doctors, nurses, or even to her family. How unjust it is that in this country 9- and 10- year-old girls have their innocence stolen from them and then live on with a permanent physical reminder of it (not to mention the long lasting emotional consequences). How can a society tolerate this injustice and turn a blind eye to it? Who will fight for them? Who will show them love and compassion? Who will give them hope?

What should our response be to this? My initial reaction was one of anger, sorrow, and helplessness. However, on further reflection, I was reminded that God is passionate about justice and mercy and is concerned deeply for the lowly and oppressed. The gospel story is one of hope for the hopeless. Our response should be to speak out in love to promote his justice, stand up for the lowly and oppressed, and be a voice of hope for those who are convinced there is none. That is my desire. That is what I will fight for.

Only by his grace,

Ndokotora Rob
Micah 6:8

Church growth and clustering ... continued from p. 16

that can be summarized in two simple principles: CRCs thrive in geographic clusters; isolated congregations rarely reach 200 members in size.

The concept of "clusters" introduces an organic perspective on the dynamics of church growth in the CRC. Classes are artificial groupings. Clusters, however, represent the real boundaries of families and friends. You can have lunch with anyone in your cluster on a Sunday afternoon. But you may not be in the same state as some people in your classis.

Clusters form the area within which we have our greatest influence. We are most likely known and recognized in our own clusters. This is not necessarily true in our classis. In my case, I belong to Classis Pacific Northwest, which covers a large geographic region from Olympia, WA to Lynden, WA and from the Pacific Ocean to the Cascade Mountains, approximately 6,000 square miles. Plus Alaska! Very few people can be known throughout such a large area. Instead, most of us only have significant influence in our hometown and cluster.

Opportunities: Having multiple local congregations work to-

gether creates new prospects for ministry, especially outreach. Consider these two examples of what clustered congregations can consider that isolated congregations cannot.

1. Sometimes a nearby ministry begins to siphon the youth out of local congregations. A cluster of CRCs might see this as a ministry opportunity and band together to create an alternative ministry. For example, they might begin a Saturday night worship service meeting in the gym of the public high school. Different music, different venue, different dress, but the same Gospel. The cluster has power which no single congregation has.
2. In a high-density urban setting an "anchor" church might cooperate with Christian Reformed Home Missions to establish several new outreach congregations. This is happening in Seattle, where Rev. Harry Weidenaar and First CRC of Seattle have teamed up with Rev. Eleanor Rietkerk and Mill Creek CRC to serve as the "cluster anchor" for three or four new church developments - Emmaus Road (Eric Likkel), The Sanctuary (Randy Rowland), a new Korean congrega-

tion (Bom Su Kim) and a not yet named congregation (Brian and Betsy Turnbull). Rather than "competing" for members, the five or six congregations share resources and find that they all benefit from the synergistic effect of clustering.

None of the participants could have accomplished this individually; the power of the cluster is cumulative.

Christian Reformed churches have a history of thriving in clusters. Pejoratively we may call them "colonies" for their habit of being isolationist. While this "colonial" isolation may have been a plague in our history, it is now clear that the "colony" or "cluster" can become a powerful platform for successfully extending the web of the kingdom. Clusters can develop new congregations that can become strong and successful without damaging the health of the anchor congregations. From Lynden to Langley to Calgary to Chino, experience shows that a strong church with a clear vision from God can expand its ministry boundaries without weakening itself.


Rev. David Snapper is minister of Anchor of Hope CRC, Silverdale, Washington.

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Pastoral Excellence

Leadership in the Church: The rest of the story

James C. Dekker

Limitations of leadership

In this extended series of articles, we have explored *character, competence, conviction and confluence* as crucial traits for church leaders and leadership. These were articulated by the Christian Reformed Church's Leadership Development Team in its stimulating paper "Leadership: A Working Definition." All these traits are found to some degree not just in individual leaders, but – importantly for communities of saints – in a congregation's collective leadership. If leadership, leaders and the remaining majority members of Christ's body develop those Spirit-nourished traits, Christ's Church will faithfully blossom and produce other leaders. Better still, individual leaders will not have to carry the worldly burden of being the hero, the role model whom all are expected to follow. Sadly the map of church history is littered with tragedies of heroic leaders who not only fell, but often took ministries down with them, always tarnishing Christ's name, often abusing the spirits and lives of naively trusting followers.

Perplexingly, though, leaders who fall often possess in startlingly high degrees all four leadership traits. Maybe every leader ought to know and repeat daily Jeremiah's warning about our deceitful human hearts in prayers of confession (17:9). Trouble is, no matter how much training or reading we do, no matter how many accountability groups or spiritual retreats we attend – sin, the devil and all his minions lie in ambush.

Thus a frightfully realistic, hence necessary corollary to all axioms of leadership is this: *Church leaders WILL trip, stumble and fall.* (You doubt? Check out Romans 3:23.) Not all will do irreparable damage to themselves or others as they fall; sometimes no one but God notices – so good we are at cover-ups. Regardless, the result is always disheartening, whether the fall is public or private, in congregations or denominations large or small.

Living with the limits

We could quit right here with this hard-nosed warning and soldier bravely on, mourning losses, modestly celebrating victories, and praying withal for protection and forgiveness. But so doing would leave unredeemed that sad but

true corollary that unbalances all church, congregational or personal scorecards. Thus this bad news warning must not be the final piece in the church leadership puzzle.

Here is the rest of the story of church leadership: *Every leader's fall – big or little – is a death of sorts, damaging churches, leaders, followers. Yet Christ's death and resurrection can breathe new life into our earthly projects that, with blessing, grow into eternity.* These two sentences fittingly form a cross – with human failure and Christ's work respectively the horizontal and vertical pieces.

This cruciform framework provides the model for every Christian and church, never excusing failure, never supplanting the place of leadership traits, yet giving transcendent meaning and hope to all church leaders from youth workers to deacons and elders to pastors and administrative committees.

In earlier articles we've illustrated each leadership trait by tracing conflated episodes from several persons and congregations. Regrettably, we need no imagination to describe damaging failures that are so common as to be banal. All we have to do is tell the stories. As my wife's cousin sardonically says of his frailties, "I learn from my mistakes; the next time I foul up quicker than before." Leaders should take that to heart in whatever task we undertake – not to repeat, but with Christ's and our own spiritual work to avoid or change dangerous patterns, establishing mechanisms of accountability and mutual discipline with colleagues and boards or councils.

Falls as mini-deaths

As recently as 25 years ago, marital problems among church leaders were unheard of. Yet, by no means all pastors' marriages or family lives were happy. In today's candid, if not always healthy public life, suffering spouses and damaged children tell of desperate marriages held together for the sake of appearance, legalistic commitment and to avoid open trouble in the church. Yet, these people bore years of unresolved violence, abuse, affairs and adulteries and more that few suspected and no one knew.

All such histories record mini-deaths, the results of sin ignored or partially hidden. Such secret sin, unconfessed and unforgiven, surely harms congregations, but

rarely in ways that we can measure. It is usually felt as a foggy vagueness hanging over a community. In order to avoid lasting damage leaders and congregations must and can develop mechanisms of spiritual and vocational restoration where possible, legal, and prudent. We must run the risks of restoration, yet also look for less risky futures for fallen leaders if restoration is not feasible.

Falling hard and publicly

In the late 1970s a pastor of a large mid-western congregation worked through a shameful, painful, but eventually blessed series of experiences revealing one fruit of Christ's resurrection. Late one night the pastor was arrested after soliciting an undercover police officer for sex. The story played out on the front pages of the local newspaper over the next week. The council chair soon reported to the press that the popular pastor had confessed fully. In the light of his confession, the council decided to forgive the pastor and restore him to pulpit and pastoral duties after a month's leave. Astonishingly, the congregation strongly supported this decision.

Soon the classis and denomination supervising ordained ministry reversed the hasty decision. The newspaper reporter unleashed an ignorant public debate with all the depth of TV talk-shows: the denomination was cruel, abused its power, lacked a forgiving spirit, and other slothful nonsense. What the reporter did not write or understand was that in their mutually agreed denominational covenant, classis and denomination fittingly overruled council and congregation. They prescribed a minimum six-month leave for the pastor and instituted steps for pastor, council and congregation to aim at full confession, forgiveness and potential – but not certain – restoration. Though not without tension and heightened emotions, the pastor, council and congregation agreed to the larger bodies' wisdom.

After three months, during which the pastor and his wife engaged in individual and couple counseling, the denominational "pastor of pastors" met several times with the council. The pastor was invited midway through the process. Six months after the arrest and following several more meetings, pastor and council agreed it was too soon for restoration.



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Leadership in the Church.....continued from p. 18

Discussions and counseling had unearthed deeper related issues and similar past events needing more confession, more prayer, more deliberate actions before restoration could be considered.

Six months stretched to a year. All the while, ever more cordial, spiritually maturing meetings and counseling sessions took place to deal with years of hidden falls and mini-deaths. Finally, after that year's rigorous spiritual discipline for pastor, council and congregation, the church held a sober, profoundly thankful worship service to restore the pastor within the congregation. He worked there five more years, then moved to another church for fifteen years of fruitful work, dying before retirement.

It could have turned out differently and badly. Had the pastor returned to work a month after his arrest, his confession would have been superficial, the council's forgiveness premature and the congregation's life

spiritually shallow and relationally lazy. Resurrection would have been cheap and restoration short. Because of the demanding process that eventually all parties followed, however, for five more years they experienced more falls and deaths – and uncountable more resurrections than journalists ever understood or reported.

However, not every case of personal resurrection can or should end in restoration. In situations of abuse or predation, it is neither prudent nor, in many cases, legal to pursue vocational restoration. Not that anyone doubts the fact or the continuing power of Christ's resurrection. Such fallen leaders can experience forgiveness, but should find other work that will bless them and God's world in safer ways – and remove them from places of earlier temptation and failure. That does not deny a calling; it sets the calling within limits that can keep leaders from giving Christ and his church a bad

name and from harming God's flock.

In closing this series of essays, we need only say that no leader can work long or faithfully for Christ, no church can develop spiritual health, unless we all kneel together at the cross of the only One who did not fall, but did die so we can live from now into eternity. It took the work of Christ so we can work for Christ and his church.

James C. Dekker, pastor of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, remembers that he never was able faithfully to practice personal devotions until he suffered his own mini-death and found hope from Christ's resurrection through once-broken colleagues.

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Classifieds

Birth	Thank You	Anniversaries	Obituaries
<p>Harvey & Elaine DeKleine, thank God for his gift of their precious son Isaiah Richard born Thursday July 27, 2006.</p> <p>A little brother for Alaynah and Derek. Another grandchild for Peter & Jane Van Duyvenvoorde and Dick & Roelie DeKleine as well as another great-grandchild for Mrs. G. Veld (Welland) and Mr. H. Mulder (Holland Christian Homes)</p>	<p>THANK YOU</p> <p>We sincerely thank all those who remembered us on the occasion of our 60th Wedding Anniversary. Your words of blessing, cards, and/or presence at the Open House made the event especially memorable. We thank God for his faithfulness.</p> <p>Sincerely Tunis & Adriana Verdonk & family</p>		<p>Peacefully at her home near Gorrie, Ontario on Friday, July 21, 2006 our Lord called to himself AALTJE VAN DONKERSGOED (nee Versteeg) in her 99th year</p> <p>Beloved wife of her late husband Eibert (1985) Dear mother of: Gerrie & Jake Graydanus, Listowel, Ontario Tinie & (Bob) Versteeg, Gorrie, Ontario Fenna & Bert Zantigh, Smithville, Ontario Hennie & Bill de Boer, Lucknow, Ontario Christine & (Harry) Karsten, Listowel, Ontario Eibert & Nellie van Donkersgoed, Guelph, Ontario John & Betty van Donkersgoed, Gorrie, Ontario Henk & Margaret van Donkersgoed, Gorrie, Ontario</p> <p>Dear grandmother of 44 grandchildren. Dear great-grandmother of 103 great-grandchildren.</p> <p>Predeceased by son-in-law Harry Karsten in 1997, son-in-law Bob Versteeg in 2006, 2 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren.</p> <p>Visitation was on Monday, July 24, 2006 from 2 to 4 and 7 to 9 p.m. at Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Listowel where the funeral service was conducted on Tuesday, July 25, 2006 at 2.</p> <p>Correspondence: John & Betty van Donkersgoed, RR#2, Gorrie ON N0G 1X0 I know that my Redeemer lives, Job 19:25a</p>
<p>Anniversaries</p> <p>August 20, 1966 August 20, 2006 London, Ontario Ancaster, Ontario</p> <p>Thankful for the Lord's abundant blessings in the lives of our parents and grandparents, we are pleased to announce the 40th Wedding Anniversary of HENRY AND JANE (Nieboer) BROUWER</p> <p>Eric & Brenda Brouwer, Ottawa, ON Carraugh, Gillian, Nicholas Laura & Pieter Katerberg, Listowel, ON Erin, Nicole, Justin, Adam, Helena Brenda & Ian White, Pembroke, ON Alexa, Shauna, Kyra Darren & Paula Brouwer, Ottawa, ON Micah Duane & Trish, Copetown, ON Sarah, Ryan</p> <p>Psalms 33:20 746 Garner Rd E, Ancaster ON L9G 3K9</p>	<p>Thankful to God for his goodness to them, we are pleased to announce the 60th Wedding Anniversary of our parents TED AND ANKE VELLENGA September 5, 1946—September 5, 2006</p> <p>To celebrate this event an Open House is planned for Saturday August 12th from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., at the Mountainview Christian Reformed Church 290 Main St. East, Grimsby. <i>Best Wishes Only.</i></p> <p>Ted and Anke currently reside at Suite 320 275 Main Street East, Grimsby ON L3M 5N8.</p> <p>As children we pray that the Lord will bless and keep them in his care.</p> <p>Jayne & Bob Hamersma, Paula & Case DeHaan, Peter & Hennie Vellinga, Hetty Vellinga, Sharon & Buck Strang. Twelve grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.</p>	<p>Samia 1946 August 27 Ingersoll 2006</p> <p><i>Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth and righteousness looks down from heaven. Ps. 85</i></p> <p>The children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, extended family and friends feel very blessed to look forward to celebrating the 60th Wedding Anniversary of Rev. JAMES AND LENA (Esser) JOOSSE at the Ingersoll CRC on Saturday, August 19.</p> <p>As Christian parents, friends and role models they have and continue to be an inspiration to us. They faithfully passed on God's covenant promises to us. We praise God for giving them to each other and providing them with a family. Christian community and country in which they could witness and minister to God's saving and redeeming grace in Jesus Christ in all areas of life.</p> <p>Their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren: John & Yetty (Adema), Ingersoll, On. Joshua & Angela (VanAsselt) – Josiah, Grace, Angela Sara & Michael Joosse-Flikkema – Jonas, Wesley, Elena Eva & Joel Kooops – Brendan, Anika Ivan & Verna (VanderMeer), Newmarket, On. Darryl Karen & Joshua Hollander – Luke, Haley, Avery James & Alice (VanderMeer), Edmonton, Alta. Paul Katie Marilyn & Jan VanDenBerg, Spruce Grove, Alta. Bradley Melinda & Kyle Manweiler – Justin, Ethan Ashley & Jeff Wood Glenda Gilbert, Ailsa Craig, On. Franklin, Calgary, Alta. David & Yvonne (DeVries), Calgary, Alta. Kristen Daniel Bryan</p> <p>Home address: 298A Oxford St. Ingersoll ON N5C 2W1 Email address: jljooose@execulink.com</p>	<p>JACOB (JACK) HEERINGA peacefully entered into the presence of his Lord and Savior at Shalom Manor on Monday, July 3, 2006 in his 93rd year.</p> <p>Beloved husband of Jenny Heeringa for 64 years.</p> <p>Loved father and grandfather of: Jerry & Judy Heeringa Jonathan & Jennifer, Julie & Jason, Jeremy & Laura Pauline (1999) and Henry Boer Christopher & Dawn, Chantelle & Jon, Celina & Jake Jackie & Rain Selles Suzanne & Mike, Alisha, Robert Evelyn & Rod Dengerink Jodi, Danielle, Karl</p> <p>Dear great-grandfather of Pieter, Gerrit, Aren and Dylan Survived by brothers Jan and Henk and other relatives in Canada and Holland.</p> <p>A celebration of his life was held at Mountainview Christian Reformed Church in Grimsby, Ont.</p> <p>Correspondence: Mrs. J. Heeringa 275 Main St. E. Unit 116 Grimsby ON L3M 5N8</p>
 <p><i>Teach me your paths...for you are God my Savior. Psalm 25:4b,5b</i> On July 1 1966, HENRY AND LENY LAMMERS were married in Brampton Ont.</p> <p>Grateful to God for 40 years of his faithfulness are their 4 children: William & Karen Lammers, Beamsville, ON Allan & Amy Lammers – Eva, Noah, Benjamin, Portland, OR Audrey Lammers, Sacramento, CA Rita & Mitchell Wechsler, Toledo, OH</p> <p>Henry & Lenny's address is 120 Rankin Lake Rd, Parry Sound ON P2A 2W8</p>	<p>Anniversaries</p> <p>Brockville 1956 September 7 Listowel 2006</p> <p>LIEUWE AND RIEMIE GREYDANUS (Hiemstra)</p> <p>hope to celebrate their 50th Wedding Anniversary together with their family and friends.</p> <p>Jack & Darlene Greydanus, Listowel Jane & Roy Rozendal, Listowel Ev & Gerry Dentoorn, Atwood Jim & Emily Greydanus, Trowbridge Diane & Mark Kenilworth grandchildren and great-grandchildren</p> <p>An Open House will be held on Sept 2, 2006 at Bethel C.R.C. Listowel Ont. from 2 - 4 p.m. <i>Best wishes only please.</i></p> <p>Home address: RR#4, Listowel ON N4W 3G9</p>	<p>August 1, 1956 Woodstock, Ontario August 1, 2006 Waterloo, Ontario</p> <p>With thankfulness to God we celebrate our 50th Wedding Anniversary JOHN AND FENNY ZWYGERS nee Klingenberg</p> <p>together with children and grandchildren, Christine & Jerry Troianello Jim & Joanne Zwyzers Jeremy, Steven & Christopher Gary Zwyzers & Gwen Battler Nicole</p> <p>Address: 546 Rheinland Pl Waterloo ON N2V 2M9</p> 	<p>BETTY (Reitsma) TIGCHELAAR John 14: 1-13 March 29, 1916 – July 24, 2006</p> <p>Married to George Tigchelaar (now deceased) who together raised four children: Helen married to Harvey Johnston, Colorado Ed married to Karen (Goodbrand) Tigchelaar, Carlisle Diane married to David Johnston, Orangeville Martin (Mike) married to Ada (Schaafsma now deceased), Carlisle</p> <p>Fondly regarded as children as well Ralph & Corrie Vos</p> <p>Mom was blessed to hold in her arms 14 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren.</p> <p>She was the beloved sister of Ann Tigchelaar who resides in Shalom Manor, Grimsby and to her deceased brothers, Tys Reitsma, Sid Reitsma and Bill Reitsma.</p> <p>Our prayers were answered when the Lord called mom home as her health had been failing for the last four months. What comfort it is to all of us imagining her in heaven rejoicing with all those who have gone before her.</p> <p>We thank God for our beautiful mother, grandmother (grams) and great-grandmother (gg)</p> <p>The Lord willing a memorial service will be held August 5, 2006, 2:30 p.m. at Heritage CRC, Covenant Towers, HCH, Brampton.</p> <p>Correspondence: Diane Johnston, RR#5 Orangeville ON L9W 2Z2</p>

Classifieds/Job Opportunities

Obituaries

BETTY ROFFEL nee Geerlinks

went to be with her Lord and Savior on July 8, 2006 at Faith Manor, Holland Christian Homes, Brampton

Our only comfort in life and in death is that we belong, body and soul to our faith-ful Savior, Jesus Christ....

Lords Day 1

Psalm 121:8

Loving wife of Harry for 54 years.

Dear mother of:

Fran & Hank Rensink

Harry & Milly Roffel

Sylvia & Reg Mulder

Gary & Brenda Roffel

Fred (with the Lord)

Marg & Harry Bloemendal

Liz & Jim Boss

Loving Oma & Grandma of 21 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren.

Correspondence: Harry Roffel,
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c/o Christian Courier
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Please submit resumes and applications to:

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13 Wilholme Dr RR3, St. Catharines ON L2R 6P9

(Applications must be received by September 30, 2006)

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Please forward a letter of application and resume to

Dr. Leendert Mos, Campus Ministry Committee

email: imos@ualberta.ca

or telephone 780-436-1539 (home),

before October 1, 2006.

Potential applicants are invited to visit the Campus Ministry website:
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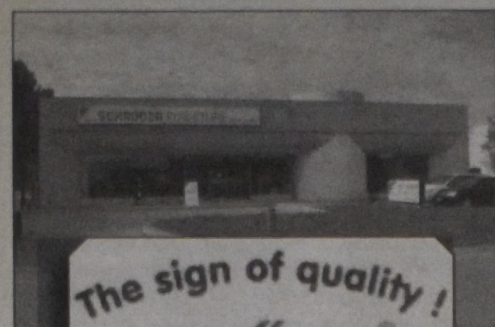
Dr. Jacob P. Ellens, Vice-President (Academic)
Redeemer University College
777 Garner Road East
Ancaster, ON L9K 1J4 Canada
jellens@redeemer.ca

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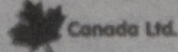
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Event

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Events/Advertising

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- Aug. 26, 27** Forest Christian Reformed Church closing ceremonies. For information, phone: 519-786-6649 or 519-786-5822 or Email: ForestCRC@CRChurches.net See ad July 24 issue.
- Aug. 28** Practices start for Liberation choir, 7:30 PM, Second Christian Reformed Church, McLaughlin and Steeles Ave, **Brampton** ON. E-mail Willem: willem@pianos.ca or Phone Tjitske (905)520 0207 or Lucie (905) 877 8339. www.liberationchoir.com New members needed!
- Sep 11** Practices for Liberation choir, (Burlington area) 7:30 PM, Crossroads CTS Chapel, North Service Road, **Burlington** ON E-mail Willem: willem@pianos.ca or Phone Tjitske (905)520 0207 or Lucie (905) 877 8339. www.liberationchoir.com New members needed!
- Sep 23** **Prayer Healing Service**, 7:00 pm, Meadowlands Fellowship CRC, 211 Stonehenge Drive, **Ancaster**. For details call: (905)528-0353
- Oct 21** **Day of Encouragement** - Celebrating our God while becoming equipped for ministry. It is an opportunity for all deacons, elders and all other church members to be encouraged, inspired and trained for service. It happens at Hamilton District Christian High School in **Ancaster**. Theme: Come to the Water. Choose from 49 workshops and 15 Service Sites. Cost \$50. Contact your deacons for a registration form or contact Diaconal Ministries at (905) 336-2920. More details are available at www.diaconalministries.com.
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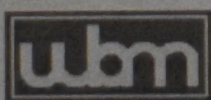
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News

Gasoline's fledgling rivals: the race to power your car

As pump prices soar, the push intensifies to find cheaper and greener options.

Mark Clayton

The alternative fuels race is on. Again. After a 20-year hiatus, ethanol, methanol, biodiesel, electricity, and other potential fuels are pushing to challenge king gasoline at the pump.

But the race is a tricky one. The successful fuel not only has to be cheaper than gasoline, it has to be produced in huge quantities and survive future swings in gas prices. There's another potential hurdle: Environmentalists want alternatives with smaller greenhouse-gas emissions than gasoline.

So, it's not clear that any alternative fuel will cross the finish line — let alone beat gasoline — anytime soon. Analysts worry that, in an eerie repeat of the 1980s, alternative fuels will get going just as the price of oil falls to a level where they can't compete.

Among today's alternative-fuel contenders, the early leader is ethanol made from corn. "Corn ethanol is the one to beat right now," says Paul Gallagher, professor of economics at Iowa State University.

The economics make sense. Middle East tensions and other factors have pushed the oil price higher: In June it averaged \$65 a barrel. At that price, it cost \$2.20 to produce a gallon of gasoline — about \$1.56 for the oil itself and 64 cents for refining costs, according to the federal Energy Information Administration.

By contrast, it costs just under \$1 to produce a gallon of ethanol at current corn prices of about \$2 a bushel, Professor Gallagher estimates. That means ethanol would continue to be profitable even if oil prices drop dramatically and corn prices increase, he says.

That price buffer is key, analysts say, because history has not been kind to alternative fuels. In the 1980s, when gasoline prices were also at record levels and the nation felt similarly vulnerable to Persian Gulf oil, President Carter's US Synthetic Fuels program was in full swing. But just as various alternative fuels got going, oil prices plummeted and made most of them uncompetitive.

But ethanol made from corn faces a supply problem. Even if the entire US

corn crop were devoted to producing E85 (a blend of 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline), it would supply only about 12 percent of US needs, studies say.

That means ethanol — if it is to succeed as a true alternative to gasoline — will have to be made of something other than corn.

Other materials are being tested: corn stover, wood, wheat straw, and other organic waste. Some estimate that low-maintenance switchgrass could nearly quadruple the output of ethanol from a single acre.

But turning these cellulose-based materials into ethanol hasn't been tested at a full-production scale. One Canadian pilot plant near Ottawa can make about 80 gallons of ethanol for every ton of wheat-straw refuse it uses — costing about \$2 a gallon to produce, estimates Gallagher, who toured the facility recently. With a full-scale plant, the cost could drop well under the cost to make corn ethanol as efficiencies improve to 60 cents a gallon or less, a 2004 study by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) found.

"I'm willing to say that ethanol from cellulose is the most promising fuel we can see today," says Nathanael Greene, an NRDC analyst. "But we can't have the idea that the search is over. We need performance-based incentives to uncover other possible fuels that may be out there."

One alternative source of ethanol — sugar cane — is heavily used in Brazil. If the US lowered import barriers to sugar-cane-based ethanol, the fuel could play an important role, says Gal Luft, an analyst at the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security. Another possibility: methanol made from coal, he says.

Today, most methanol is made from natural gas. But because the US has vast coal reserves, it should do more to promote systems that turn coal into liquid fuels, Mr. Luft says. Montana and West Virginia are among several states developing plans for such systems. In Pennsylvania, systems to turn coal waste to diesel are already under way.

Methanol from coal could have a production cost of 40 to 64 cents a gallon, according to a 2003 study by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory that compared seven systems — including some developed during the US synfuels heyday. The Methanol Institute, a Washington trade group, this spring pegged the fuel's wholesale cost at 76 cents a gallon.



Making biodiesel in the garage

Methanol can be used directly as a fuel. Indy race cars have used it for years. Or it could be a rich source of hydrogen for fuel-cell vehicles. But there are hurdles that don't make hydrogen a near-term contender in the alternative-fuels race, including the steep cost of deploying hydrogen fueling stations nationwide and getting sufficiently cheap power to create hydrogen.

Methanol is also a key part of the process of making biodiesel. Production of biodiesel — a fuel that usually blends diesel with oil made from vegetable and animal fats — has soared to 75 million gallons in 2005, according to the National Biodiesel Board. But some analysts say it will have a niche role because, as with corn ethanol, the materials to make it are limited.

However, the considerable greenhouse gases released in coal-to-methanol production has environmentalists like Mr. Greene worried.

"I see a race between three types of fuel — ethanol from cellulose and sugar cane, methanol from coal, and electricity from the wall outlet in your garage charging up plug-in hybrid cars," Luft says.

Ultimately, trends in the automotive world may be what decides the winning alternative fuel. At this stage, electricity is a strong contender. Earlier this month Toyota announced it will soon move beyond gas-electric hybrid designs to "plug-in" hybrids that tap the power grid to charge their batteries and go farther on electric power alone.

Using electricity to power vehicles is so efficient and cheap that, even if the juice flows from a mix of power plants including coal-fired boilers, it would still pollute less on a national basis than using gasoline, say Greene and others who have studied the issue.

Driving 20 to 40 miles a day on electricity stored in a modern lithium ion battery would be like driving on gasoline costing just 75 cents per gallon, Luft says.

"Electricity is cheaper, cleaner, and better performing than gasoline or any of the other fuels on every parameter," he says. "But that can only happen if manufacturers make plug-in hybrids so people can connect to the grid."

Some things you can do to lower energy costs

1. Don't forget to use the fan!

Fans not only use less energy than air conditioners, but when ceiling fans are combined with air conditioning, they enable you to raise the thermostat on air conditioners and cut those AC costs.

Don't forget to turn the fans off when the room is unoccupied!

2. Open the windows when you can!

While taking an evening stroll on a cool summer night recently, we noticed that almost 90 percent of the homes still had the air conditioners going. Creating cross-ventilation by opening those windows whenever possible during non-peak heat hours will save money.

Some ask questions like, "Is it more efficient to keep your house at 74 degrees in the summer, or constantly raise the temperature to 76 or 78 when you're not at home and then kick on the AC when you return?" Most definitely, the answer is to turn off that AC when you are not home.

3. Better yet — get programmable thermostats!

If you head for work forgetting to turn off the air conditioning system, you are spending money on cooling energy that you don't need to.

Better yet, an innovative summer energy-minded home improvement that is becoming more popular is the use of motorized solar screens installed on the outside of the house, that either are activated with a sun sensor or a timer to roll down at peak sun hours to keep heat from entering the house.

4. Barbecue!

BBQ is not only about enhancing summer cuisine. Operating a natural gas BBQ costs more than 50 percent less than propane and does NOT heat up your home.

5. Summerize your fireplace!

For starts, make sure that the pilot light is off on your gas fireplace during summer months.

Make sure you use a Fireplace Plug or Draft-stopper of some kind. Studies have proven that homes with fireplaces use 30 percent more energy than homes without fireplaces.

6. Be laundry smart!

Switch to cold water when doing laundry: 85 - 90 percent of the energy used to wash your clothes is otherwise used to heat the water. Always wash full loads. If you are choosing a washer, always select a front loading model that will save water and energy — as much as 50 percent savings in energy and 40 percent savings in water.

Then, hang towels and other laundry on a clothesline when possible.

7. Seek low cost energy improvements for the bathroom

If you install water saving showerheads in each bathroom, you can cut water consumption by up to 70 percent, which also saves on the heat energy needed to heat water for bathing.



Biogas-fueled bus in Sweden. Biogas, produced by decomposing organic material, emits far less carbon dioxide than traditional fossil fuels.